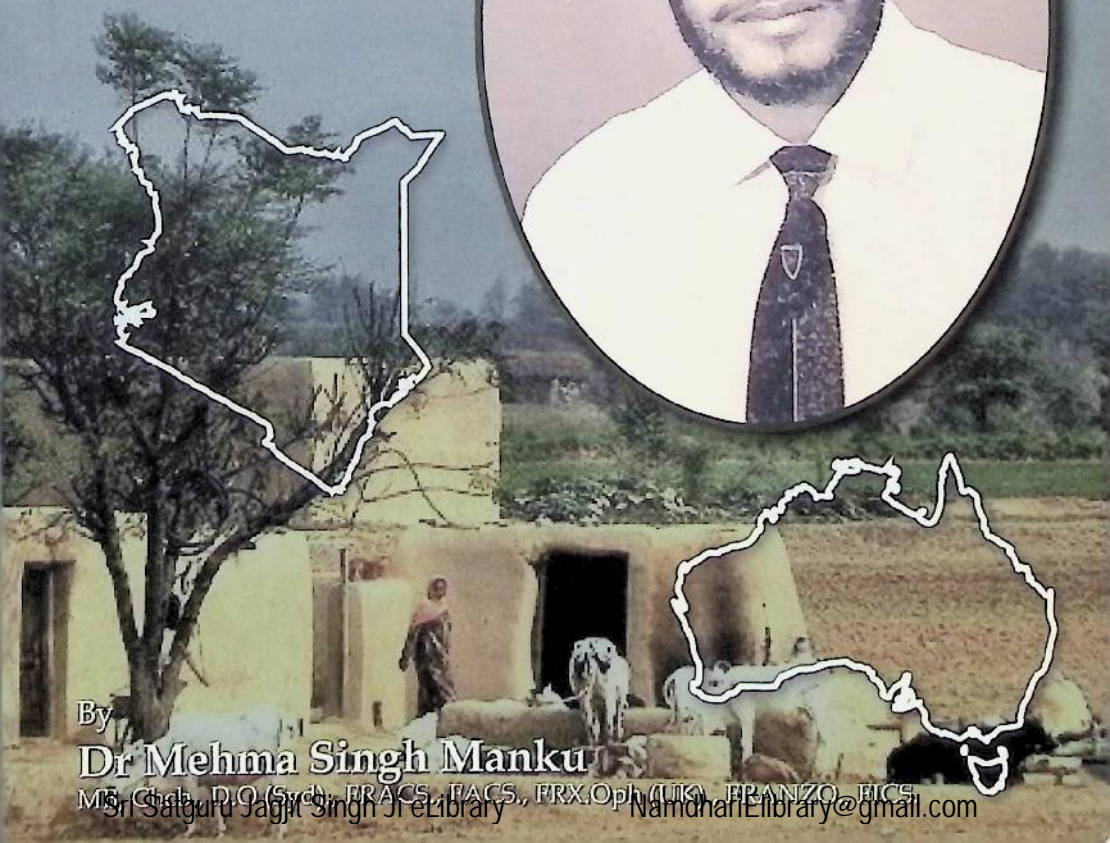


# A Village Boy



By

**Dr Mehma Singh Manku**

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**Dr Mehma Singh Manku**

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## FOREWORD

This book was written at the request of my daughters. I used to tell them about incidents in my early life which they found very interesting. They strongly felt that I should write all this down in the form of a book for the oncoming generations.

I certainly had a remarkably interesting childhood starting in India and then in Kenya. I was just an ordinary simple village boy like many others of that time. Throughout, Guruji's hand has been guiding me in the right direction.

I read somewhere that a "person's achievements should be measured from the depths one has risen rather than the heights he has reached".

It was quite a struggle to get educated in those days. The opportunities were few especially for the financially disadvantaged. My parents and teachers had more faith in me than I had in myself. A will to succeed and faith in God kept me going. I am happy with what I have achieved.

Finally, this task would not have succeeded without the great help of my daughter Piritpal who spent hours on the manuscript and included photographs from the family albums.



I am also utterly grateful to my secretary, Bev, who quite diligently persevered in reading my illegible 'doctor's handwriting' and typed the manuscript. She also designed the title page.

*Maps and some images have been copied from the internet.*

**Mehma Singh Manku**

**March 2021**

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**Scout Leader**



# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Ancestry – The Manku Clan**

There is no known record as to where the original Mankus came from. It is said that 'Manku' was a title bestowed upon our ancestor by a King. Which King, nobody knows. 'Manku' means "one who deserves respect".

In Bali, Indonesia, Manku means a High Priest or a very wise man who should be respected at all times. I went to Bali a few years ago and stayed in a hotel. The staff there soon found out that I was a Manku. They would bow to me with great respect whenever they met me! Bali has a very old culture. It is the only part of Indonesia where the old Hindu culture has remained intact even though the rest of the country is largely Muslim. The Manku people in Bali are probably not related to our clan.

The folklore told to me by Beeji/Pitaji and other older relatives is as follows: -

The Manku Clan lived in a village called *Lalauddi*, located east of Ludhiana. This village still exists but the name was changed (not known to me) only a few years ago.

The Manku Clan consisted of several families who were skilled wood and metal craftsmen. They also owned a lot of land in the village. They lived comfortably with the produce from the fields and were not only skilled builders and carpenters but also repairmen of farm implements and builders of bullock carts.

The whole clan was largely uneducated and therefore employed the local Brahmin as their account keeper. At some stage they discovered that he was cheating them and stealing money from them. A meeting was called by the elders near one of the village wells. After some coaxing, and threats, the Brahmin admitted his guilt. One of the Manku family became very upset, and in a fit of anger, grabbed hold of his sword and chopped the man's head off, which then rolled into the well. The body was taken to the forest and cremated.

Somebody must have found out that the accountant had been killed and reported the Mankus to the authorities. Upon realizing that government officials would descend upon the village to investigate the disappearance of the Brahmin, the elders called a meeting of all the Heads of the families at the same well. After a lot of discussion, they agreed to pray and took a vow.

They prayed to the Almighty, that the police should not be able to prove them guilty; and that should they be discovered innocent, none of them nor their descendants would ever drink the water from that village and that they would leave the village forever, never to return.

The police arrived but could not find the head of the Brahmin in the well, which had been the crux of the incriminating information. Divers were sent down the well. They did find a head, but it was that of a goat. The case for murder was dropped as no further evidence was found.

The Manku Clan thanked the Almighty, and in accordance with their vow, the whole clan left the village and moved away. Some moved to other villages around Ludhiana. Others headed West and settled in and around Lahore, which is now in Pakistan. Others settled around Amritsar, and Jalandhar.

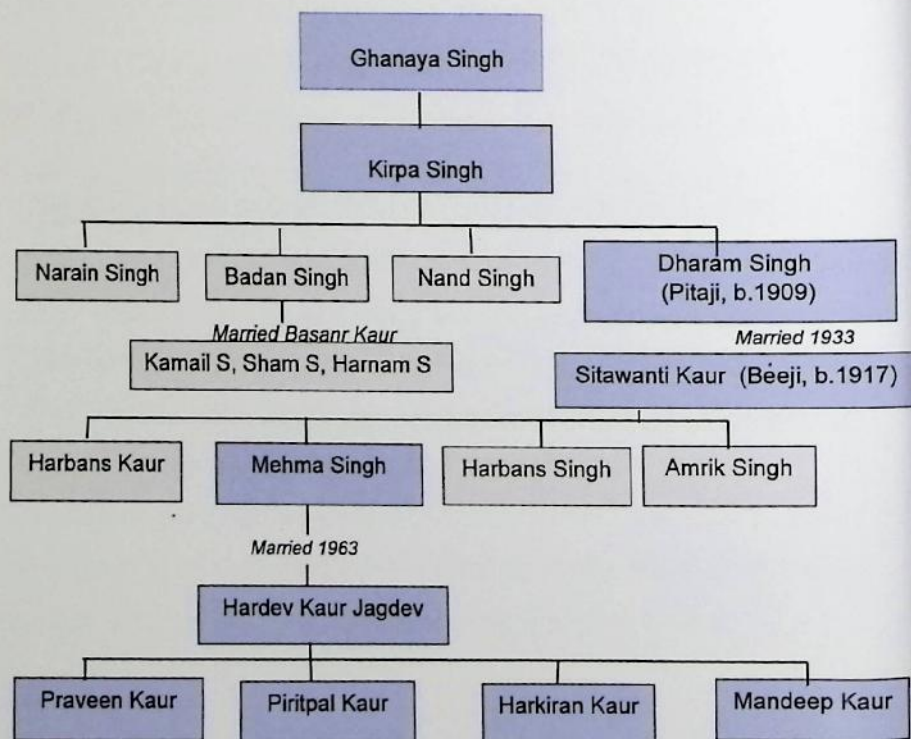
I have met the Mankus from all these areas.



## 1.1 Family Tree

### Great Grandfather - Ghanaya Singh's family

Our ancestors settled in the village of Dhindsa, near Samrala, in the Ludhiana district. They were not all Amritdhari Sikhs and would sometimes use Singh or Ram after their first names. I can only remember the name of my Great Grandfather – Ghanaya Singh.



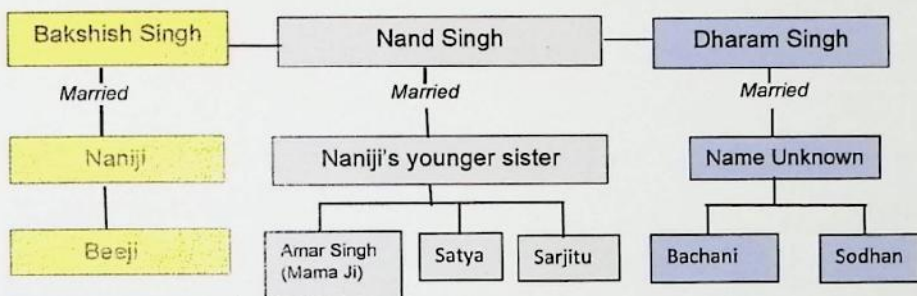


## 1.2

### Family Tree

#### Nanaji - Bakshish Singh's family

Nanaji had 2 brothers – Nand Singh and Dharam Singh.



The family lived in a village called Saundha which was about 15 miles west of Sirhind in Punjab, near Fatehgarh Sahib.

Nanaji was the eldest and the brains of the family. He married young. Nanaji had a younger sister who was married to Nanaji's younger brother, Nand Singh.



**Beeji**

Pitaji and Beeji were also married young, with Pitaji being around eight years older than Beeji. He was probably born in 1909, and Beeji in 1917.

They were married in 1933.



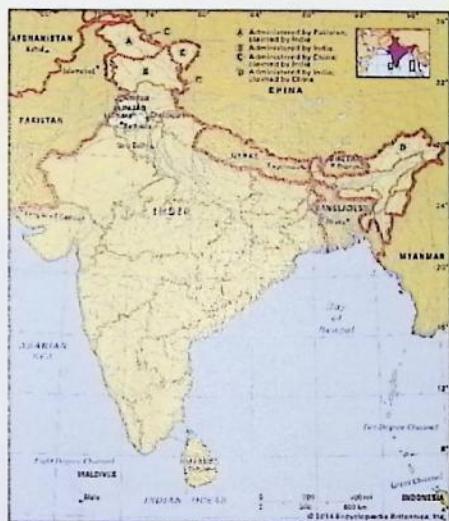
**Pitaji**

Beeji's mother passed away when she was only three months old, the cause of death unknown.

Beeji was then brought up by her mother's younger sister (who was married to Nanaji's younger brother).

At the time, Nanaji was around 20 or a bit younger; he never married again.

# 1.3 Maps



Punjab is in Northwest India



Punjab, showing Ludhiana and Fatehgarh Sahib



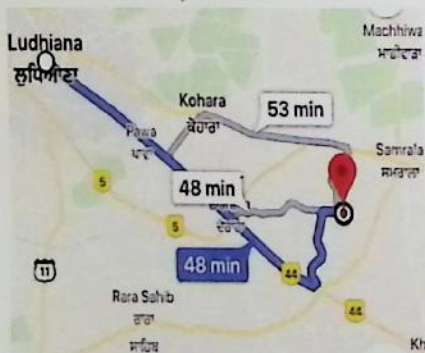
Ludhiana, showing Samrala in the east. Dhindsa is nearby.





Fatehgarh Sahib, showing Sirhind. Saundha is nearby.

Fatehgarh Sahib is a historic town and in 2004, a commemorative gate was erected in honour of the Chote Sahibzaade.



The distance from Dhindsa to Saundha is around 45km.

Dhindsa village is approx. 40km east of Ludhiana.

Saundha is approx. 65km east of Ludhiana.



The canal which runs through Saundha became known later as the *Khooni Nehar*, or the Bloody canal.

After partition in 1947, many Indians were killed, and their bodies were thrown into the canal.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Birth**

I was born when I was born!! The exact date of birth is unknown.

My birth date was chosen by the school principal quite arbitrarily because a date was required for school admission, so that date became my official date of birth for all legal purposes

I was born in Dhindsa, the ancestral village. My sister, Bhainji Harbans Kaur was born in the Nanke village, Saundha, near Sirhind. Evidently, the first child must be born in the mother's village.

After I was born, a large block of jaggery, around 10kg, was sent to Saundha, Nanaji's village, with the news that a son had been born to his daughter. This jaggery was called "*gurr di pelli*" and was tied with "*khamani*", the sacred thread.

There were celebrations in the whole village, as Nanaji was well respected in the entire village.

The task of conveying the news was given to the local barber (Naai) of the village, as was local custom in those days.

The Naais' had the duties of conveying news between villages, as they often knew who everyone was in the whole village, including their children. Therefore, they knew which children had reached marriageable age - obviously, useful news for everyone. They received clothes and money from the family as gifts.

## Early Childhood

I was not born a strong child. I think there were feeding difficulties and I was a sickly child. Beeji was always worried that I would die soon. She did not trust anybody else with my care.

At one stage, Beeji said that my tongue had dropped back, and I stopped breathing. She says that she turned me around and pulled my tongue out, and I was ok. After this incident I became quite ill again another time and she was sure I would be dead soon.

In those days, people had to go to the fields for ablution. There were no toilets in the village. The farmers encouraged people to go to their farms, as human excreta was considered a good fertilizer. Beeji refused to go out in case I died in her absence— as a result she got horribly constipated. She could certainly not take me out of the house in case bad spirits touched me. She used to sometimes throw chilli flakes onto the fire to ward off bad spirits. Later she put a black spot behind my ear to keep “*nazaar*”, (evil eye) away from me. Obviously, I recovered. Those ill health episodes lasted till I was four to nine months old, when solids were introduced into my diet.

Just before that, Beeji was advised by the village elder relatives that they had consulted a Saint about me and that my name should be changed otherwise I would die soon. So Beeji consulted her Masi who had brought her up from three months of age, so was just like her own mother. The old ladies in my Nanke village got together to discuss this. It was eventually decided that my Nanaji, who was considered a Bhagat (person who meditates a lot), should re-name me. So, he suggested that my name should be Mehma Singh, which means "famous in a godly sense". I was not to know the original. I was however, in later years, able to coax it out of Beeji.

After about the age of six months, I was healthy again. I soon started crawling and could keep up with my sister's walking speed. My sister seemed to accept me happily. If there was a new toy, she would happily give it to me.

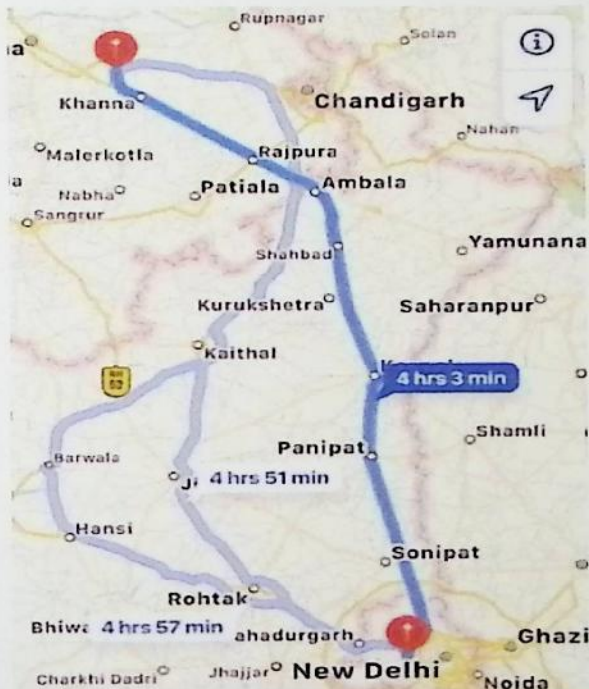
Pitaji was getting restless as there was no work for him in the village. The family workshop was run by his eldest brother, Narain Singh and he did not want Pitaji to have a share of the business. There was a lot of jealousy towards Pitaji. Narain's sons were almost the same age as Pitaji. The eldest son, Bawa Singh, was Pitaji's age. I think they were jealous of Pitaji as he had married into a good family who was reasonably well to do.



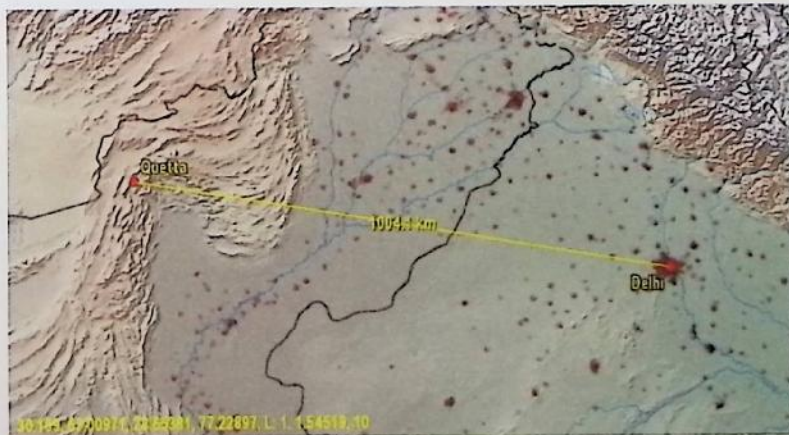
At a young age, Pitaji was also outgoing. He had travelled up as far as Quetta, which is now in Pakistan. He had also worked in Delhi and was earning good wages.

### Dhindsa to Delhi, 296km

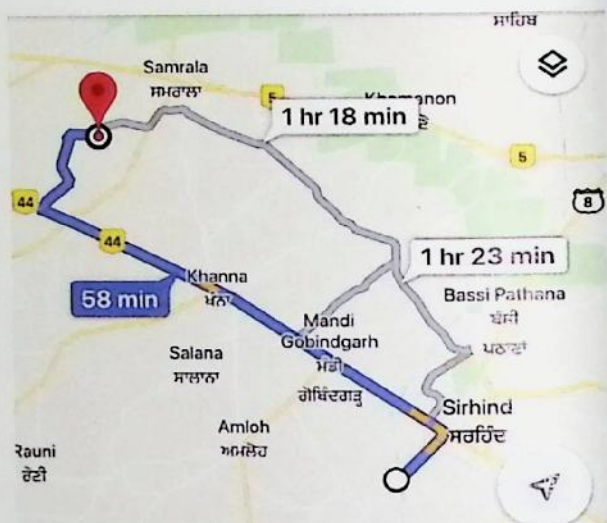
(Distances marked are by modern roads!)



Delhi to  
Quetta,  
approx.  
10044km



**Dhindsa - Saundha,**  
45km



It used to take us the whole day to travel between Dhindsa and Saundha. We would walk from Saundha to the main road, the GT (Grand Trunk Road; Rudyard Kipling wrote about it). It would take a couple of hours at least. Then we would wait for a tonga, which is a horse drawn cart with enough space for six people.

*(The Grand Trunk road, around 2500 years old, links Central Asia to India, a length of 3,670km. It was a major trade route and is now used in transportation and has been incorporated into India's highway system.)*

Sometimes we walked to Sirhind to the railway station there and took the train to Chawa. The tonga drivers would be shouting "Chawa Chawa" to call people. The cost was two annas per person. 1 anna was 1/8 of a rupee.

One time at Sirhind, a guava seller came along, and I wanted one but Beeji refused. 1 anna had 4 pesa in it. 1 pesa bought a guava. A lady sitting nearby bought it for me and although Beeji did not say anything at the time, I got a severe tongue lashing after!!! Beeji told me to never again go against her decisions in public! I took advantage of the situation to get my guava. From Chawa we would walk to Dhindsa. We took roti with us, which Beeji would prepare in the morning of our trip. One could also buy Poori Aloo from vendors at Khanna. Buying food like this was a rare event. 2 pesa bought a few poori. Mamaji once bought some. Common taps supplied fresh drinking water everywhere. We used the hand pumps and drank from our hands.

Tongas transported people from the railway stations, Bhourla and Chawapail, back to Dhindsa village and were available for hire. This obviously was only for the rich, most people would walk.



Chawapail was 7km from home. Normally tongas would carry several people on the main tarred road, running like taxis.

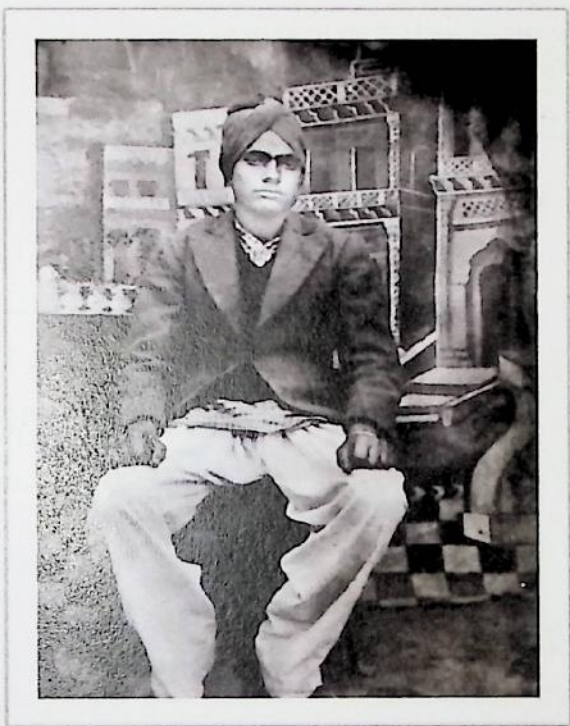


Once Pitaji came back from Africa and as he had money, he hired a tonga to go to the village. This was previously unknown!! All the children ran after it, calling out "*Tonga aagya! Tonga aagya!*" I was only about four years old at the time, but I still remember it.

Nanaji's Chacha, (we called him Baba), would mark on the wall with charcoal the number of days that Beeji was away in Dhindsa. When she had been away for some time, he would decide it was time to visit her. Nanaji himself never visited Dhindsa because in those days, the father of a bride could not drink water from the daughter's village, hence he never visited. Baba however could.

I used to pretend to be Baba, my sister would be Beeji, and I would bend over, walk slowly with a stick and say "*Theek hae, Bhai Seeto?*" (Older people could call both men and women "*Bhai* "). The olden days were not so strict for names, so Hindi names were also used. Sitawanti was Beeji's name and also for example, my Thaiji (Narain Singh's wife)'s name was Inderdevi.





**My Mamaji**  
(Beeji's cousin).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **My Grandfather, Kirpa Singh, son of Ghanaya Singh.**

Kirpa Singh, it seems, was a restless soul. He was not happy with his life in the village, because it limited him to farm equipment repairs. Sometimes people paid for the work, although mostly farmers paid with their produce, which was highly seasonal. He had four sons and they all lived in a double storey house in the middle of the village. This house was not very big.

He had heard through some people that there was money to be made in Basra and Baghdad. He had never been outside of his own village of Dhindsa. It needed a lot of courage to go so far away from the village. He nevertheless took the brave step and went to Baghdad and worked there as a carpenter/builder for a couple of years.

While he was there, he heard that more money could be made in Malaysia, so he took a ship to Malaysia. In those days, one did not need a passport or a visa. He must have left by ship from Calcutta, which was the main port of Eastern India and was the first headquarters of the British East India Company. (At the time, the British ruled there). Not much is known about his time in Malaysia, although it could not have been more than two years.

From there, he heard there was money to be made in Africa. The British were building a railway line from the coastal town of Mombasa to up north in Uganda. So, he returned to India for a short time, and then took an Arab dhow from Bombay to Mombasa.

The Arabs had been trading on that route for centuries. These sailing vessels were called 'dhows' and were important in Gulf commerce. The dhows were propelled by the monsoon winds.



**An Arab dhow.**

Dhows range from 15-35m in length and 5-9m in width.

**Bombay to  
Mombasa,  
2850nm.**





It was many months, even a year, before a letter finally came to the village that he was safe and well. He regularly sent money to my grandmother in Dhindsa. She, it seems, was a highly intelligent woman. She was looking after their four young sons by herself. Realising the family was growing, she started buying real estate in the village. She bought a couple of houses at the edge of the village. This land was out in the open opposite the village pond where there was a large open area for the children to play. She also supervised construction of a large double storey house there. The original house was given to the second son (Badan Singh) because he was married and had three children - Karnail Singh, Sham Singh, and Harnam Singh.

The eldest son, Narain Singh, and the two younger brothers moved into the big house. A large workshop was built in front of the house where the eldest carried on with the traditional work of repairing farm implements and building bullock carts.

Kirpa Singh spent a few years working in East Africa. He worked in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and in Kenya, mostly on the building of the East African railways. The line was being built towards Nairobi and was the Kenya-Uganda railway.



The main train line in East Africa passed through forests which were full of wild game. Lions sometimes became man-eaters and used to attack workers' camps and kill people.

## East Africa

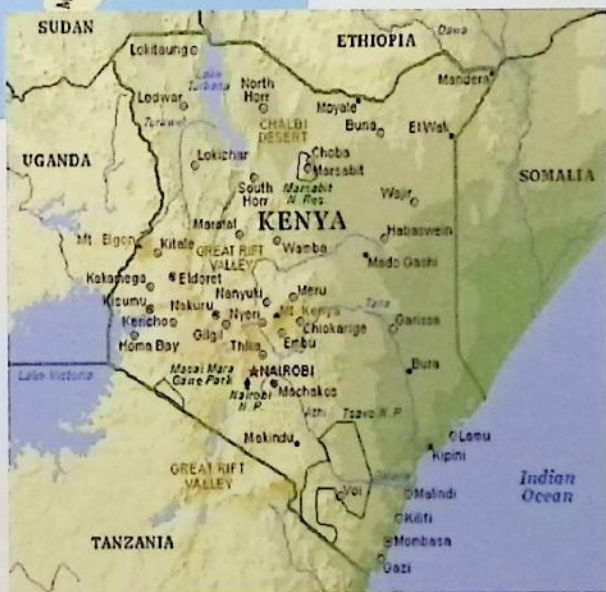


The railway line reached an area called Makindu, about 50 miles south of Nairobi.

Makindu was an important service point for the Mombasa - Kisumu section of the

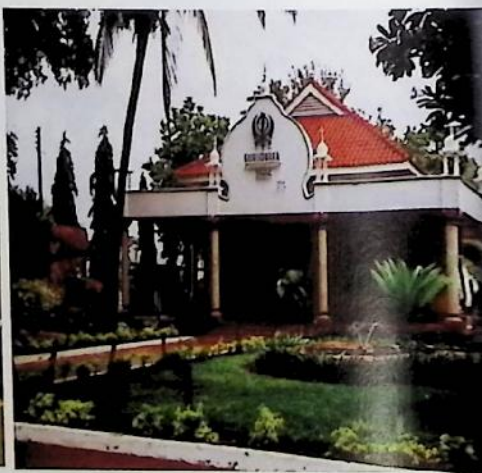
railway line project undertaken by the colonialists.

This was lion (simba) territory and lots of workers were killed by the lions.



It is said that the Sikhs prayed to Guru Gobind Singh Ji to protect them from these man-eaters. It is believed that Gururji appeared in the area and was seen by an African railway worker. The Sikhs also saw Gururji's hawk and heard a horse walking in the night.

The Sikhs then decided to build a Gurdwara in Makindu. The original track was shifted to make space for the Gurdwara and construction started in 1926. This still stands there and has been much expanded. It was originally a corrugated iron sheet construction which I saw when I was young. It is said that the lions stopped attacking the camps after this and the railway continued towards Nairobi. The railway was built mainly with the help of 32,000 Indian workers. A lot of them were Sikhs who were recruited from India which was part of the British Empire at the time.



**The original Makindu Gurdwara**



**Entrance to the old  
Gurdwara**

**Present day Makindu  
Gurdwara**



Grandfather then returned to the village and spent the rest of his life in Dhindsa.

There is an incident worth mentioning here. My grandfather wanted to extend the front of the house to accommodate a larger workshop area. The workshop was busy as it was the only one in the village. Grandfather's cousins did not do that type of work.



One night he built a wall onto the common village land to extend the workshop area. The 'Jat' families who were in the majority asked him to demolish the wall, but he firmly refused. There was a scuffle but no result. So, the farmers filed a suit against Grandfather. A date was set for the hearing in front of a magistrate.

Grandfather very cunningly inflicted injuries to his body and covered them with large bandages. He appeared in court and said, "Your Honour, I am alone and have young children. These people are so many. They beat me up mercilessly, and they threatened my family in my absence while I was away working in the British East African railways."

The judge was greatly impressed by his plea and rebuked the complainants; then threatened them with further action if they "annoyed this nice old man who had worked for the British in various parts of the world".

So, the wall still stands!

His three older sons were married by then. Pitaji was still young. Grandmother had passed away soon after Grandfather's return from Africa. Pitaji was virtually brought up by his elder brother's wife.



There was a flu epidemic, or even the plague, I'm not sure which. During this epidemic, two of the middle sons died. One had three children and the other was newly married, his wife was possibly pregnant at the time. As was the custom in those days, the latter lady then married the youngest brother, my father. He would have been 18 years old then. A daughter was born, although I am not sure whether this girl was conceived prior to the death of the older brother, or whether Pitaji was the real father. It was not revealed to me. The mother soon died while the girl was quite young. So, I have a half-sister. She lives in U.P. in India. We used to call her Rajo. Her sons own a workshop in a town called Gadarpur.

Grandfather was quite old when his sons died. He also passed away about a year later. His eldest son, Narain Singh, became the head of the family and controlled all the assets Grandfather had accumulated.

## My Father, Dharam Singh - Pitaji

Young Dharam  
Singh, age about 30.

Pitaji was the youngest son of Kirpa Singh. According to his passport, he was born around 1909, in the ancestral village of Dhindsa. Unfortunately, his mother, my grandmother, died when he was quite young, (age two?). He did not remember his mother at all and was brought up by Inderdevi, who was the wife of the eldest brother Narain. She was quite a kind lady and her eldest son, Bawa Singh, was the same age as Pitaji, so they played together.



Dharam was put into school at about the age of seven. The school was in a village called Nagre which was about 6km away. He walked to school with other children from the village. Bawa Singh was not sent to any school as far as I know. The teachers were quite cruel in those days. They believed in using the rod frequently, even for minor mistakes.

Dharam went to school diligently for three years. He learned Maths and Urdu, a language which was the national native

language in North India. This was a result of the Muslim occupation of India. Every child had to learn Urdu as all the official businesses used Urdu. It is written from right to left as is Arabic. When the British conquered India in early 1800 they kept the language as a secondary one to English. Some rudimentary English was taught in Year 10.

Pitaji was an active child. His two elder brothers worked in Delhi, the capital of British India, and would tell him about their life there and how large the city was with its wide roads which had street lighting. After 4th class at the age of 11, Pitaji said he had had enough of schooling. He did not like to be controlled. He could add, subtract, and read Urdu and he considered that enough for his future life! The elder brother who ran the village workshop felt that Pitaji should remain in school.

One day he packed his books and in half-time break at school, he walked to the nearest railway station which was about 10km from the village. He had never been away from the village and had never sat in a train before. He followed other people to the platform and got onto the next train. He did not know where the train was going. The plan was to go to Delhi, join his older brothers, work there and earn his own money! The train moved and he sat in the corner of one of the 3rd class cabins. Soon the



ticket inspector came to check tickets. Pitaji, of course, had no ticket, nor did he have any money on him.

When the inspector (they used to be called TT's) reached him and asked for the ticket, Pitaji had no idea what the TT was asking for, so he sat quietly. The TT looked at him and saw that he had schoolbooks with him. He asked whether he was running away from home, to which Pitaji nodded. He asked where he was going. Pitaji replied that he was headed to Delhi to join his elder brother and work with him. The TT asked whether he had the address with him, which he did not. The TT very wisely and kindly took him off the train at the next station. Holding his arm firmly, he led him to the station master and explained the situation. The station master knew a lot of people in the local area. He found an old man from our village and told him to take Pitaji back home on the next train, which he did, quite diligently.

Young Dharam refused to go to school after that. The school, he found, was too limiting for his taste. He wanted to see things outside of the village.

After a few months his brothers came home on leave. They were shocked to hear what their younger brother had done. If he had succeeded in reaching Delhi, he would have been totally lost. Delhi was the biggest city in India with millions of people. The



brothers tried to convince Pitaji to return to school, or work with the eldest brother in the village workshop. He refused to do either of these.

When they next went to Delhi, he went with them, at the tender age of just 12. He learnt the trade of builder/carpenter under their care. It seems he was a fast learner and soon started earning a small wage.

They left Delhi and went to work in Quetta (now in Pakistan). Grandfather had already worked there. After a couple of years, the two brothers died of the flu or the plague, so Pitaji then worked in different places on his own.

One of the older brothers who died had been married. He had no children. Pitaji was virtually forced to marry his widow. This was the custom in those days. A daughter was born, and she was called Raj Kaur (Rajo). Rajo's mother died when Rajo was only a few months old, I am not sure how old she was. Pitaji was away working most of the time.

Rajo was brought up by the joint family as was custom in those days. She was later married to a carpenter in the next village while she was quite young. The marriage took place after Pitaji married Beeji. Rajo's husband died of Typhoid fever two years

later. They did have a son who was brought up by his grandparents in the village of Chomo. He was not allowed to contact his mother. Rajo was re-married into a Namdhami family in one of the nearby villages. She then had three daughters and two sons by this marriage. The family moved to Gadarpur in U.P., and still live there. They have a blacksmithing business and repair farm implements.

Pitaji re-married when he was about 24. He was recommended as a good match for Beeji by mutual relatives. By this time, he was earning reasonably good money by village standards. They lived in a joint family system with his eldest brother and his family. However, the brother had a very large family and relations became tense, so Pitaji was given a small house behind the main house and lived separately.

One of the reasons the brother's family did not now like Pitaji was mere jealousy because he got married into a relatively rich family. Beeji was about 15, 16 years old when they married. She was from a highly religious family and had been taught to be modest, so she remained quiet within the family and was quite shy. They initially thought that she was probably not mature enough for the marriage. Beeji had been given a lot of gold jewellery by her father (Nanaji), who was reasonably well to do.

One day the elder brother's wife took most of the gold jewellery from Beeji for "safe-keeping". One of the rooms in the house had a false ceiling and she hid the jewellery there whilst Beeji was in another room, but Beeji was very shrewd. She noticed the secretive behaviour of her sister-in-law and saw her hiding the jewellery through a peephole in the door.

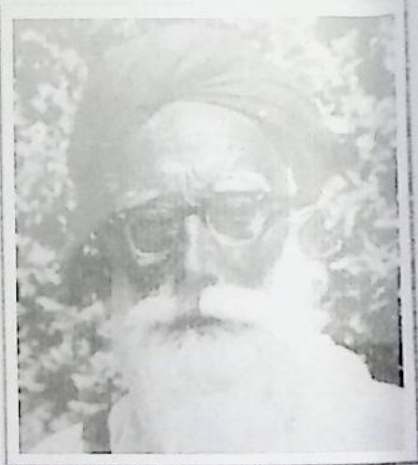
Before they moved into their own house, the brother's family had a meeting while Pitaji was away. They told Beeji to do some chores in another part of the house. Beeji knew something important was going to be discussed involving Pitaji and herself. So, she snuck into the room next door and overheard them. They had decided that she and Pitaji would not be given any share in the family assets and that the jewellery which had been taken from Beeji would be reported as "stolen". Beeji heard all this. She told Pitaji about this when he returned home. That night while the family was asleep, Pitaji removed the jewellery from the hiding place. There was a lot of argument between the brothers and they eventually ended up living in separate houses.

Before long, Beeji was expecting a child and she was sent to her parent's house in Saundha where she delivered a girl. My older sister was a small child and was named Harbans Kaur. This was in 1934, the exact date is unknown.



## **My Maternal Grandfather, Bakshish Singh, Nanji**

Nanaji was born in the village of Saundha, not far from Sirhind. His approximate birth year would be 1895 - 1897. He was the eldest. There were two younger brothers, Nand Singh and Dharam Singh. There was some inherited land holding which the family traditionally worked. They were also skilled builders and carpenters.



Nanaji was very enterprising. He was also very religious and believed in Guruji's teachings. He worked in Delhi and undertook building work for a while. He spent all his life in Saundha. He had no formal schooling but could read and write Punjabi. He was also interested in business. He would buy produce from the village and sell it at a profit in the city. He was also the village Banker. People would often come and borrow money from him. There was a lot of mutual trust. Nanaji had developed a reputation of being an honest and God-fearing person.



On the side, he had another business. He had a chariot which he hired out for weddings. It was well decorated and could seat at least four people. It needed two bullocks to pull it around. This brought in cash money during the season when farm produce was low. They also had several buffaloes for milk; oxen to work the land, and of course, the chariot.

Nanaji was quite well off by village standards. He bought more land around the village and increased the family holdings considerably. They mostly grew peanuts, maize and chillies.

There is an incident worth mentioning. Nanaji would load his bullock cart with grain and take it into the market in the city to sell the grain, as one of his businesses.

One night, while he was sitting in meditation, he heard a noise. He went outside and saw one of the villagers with a gun on his shoulder, trying to pull the cart away. This man was known to Nanaji, as he was a criminal in the village, known for cattle rustling and other thefts.

The man also recognised Nanaji. Nevertheless, he pointed the gun at Nanaji, and told him to move away so that he could take the cart. Nanaji said, "Don't point the gun at me, if you want something all you have to do is just ask me. If you want the cart,

you can take it, let us see how much it helps you." The man left with the cart. five days later, as the man was sitting in his house, he suddenly developed a severe headache, and died a few minutes later.

Nanaji attended his funeral. He also attended the engagement ceremony of the thief's son, and gave the son Sagan, but never mentioned the theft to anyone there.

Nanaji and Nand Singh were married into the same family. Their wives were sisters. The youngest brother was married in a different village.

Beeji's mother died when she was only a few months old. She was brought up by Masi (the younger brother's wife). They all lived in a big two-storey house. This house still stands. Nanaji had several offers of marriage but he refused to re-marry. He devoted time to his business and meditated a lot. He paid for all the weddings in the family and was responsible for all other expenses associated with a large joint family. The younger brothers, Nand and Dharam Singh did not work on the land. They always took up building jobs wherever they could get and were away from home a lot.

Nanaji was an Amritdhari Sikh and he encouraged the children to meditate and learn to read Gurbani. He was closely involved with the Gurdwara movement. The British took over the administration of the Gurdwaras to control the Sikhs. There was a lot of agitation and protests. Nanaji went to jail several times. Sikhs lay down on the railway lines. Some were killed. Eventually, the British Government had to give in and Gurdwaras were handed back over to the Sikhs.

Nanaji was given a certificate by the Punjab Government to thank him for his part in the Gurdwara liberation movement. This important document was sadly lost by the family.

In the later years of his life, Nanaji built a small hut on his farm near the well, where he spent most of his time meditating. He also continued to work on the farm. Mamaji and the family brought him his meals from the house in the village. He had reached such a high stage of spirituality in his meditation that he knew when he was going to die. The day before he passed away, he brought a mango tree home and planted it on the farm. He told his grandson to water it regularly and it will bear fruit eventually. The tree still stands there and bears very sweet mangoes.



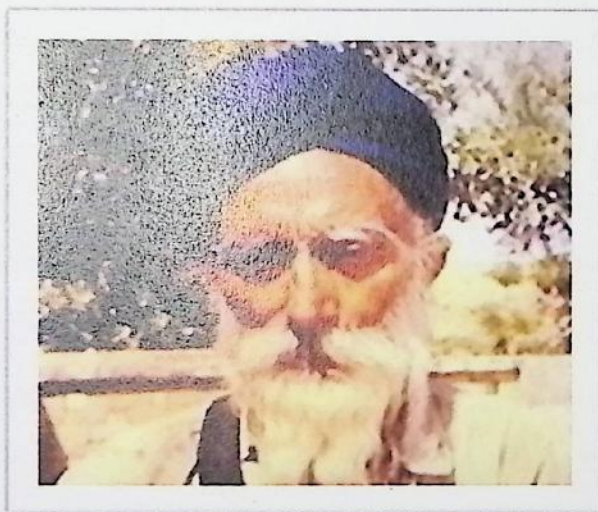
On the last day of his life, he was sitting on his bed and people from the village were gathered around as usual; they often came to seek advice. He said, *"My time has come, call my younger brother. I want to say something to him before I go."*

Mamaji and his wife were also there. Nanaji asked her what was for lunch today. She replied, *"bhindia"*. He then instructed her to go and cook them, as he knew that she would cry when he was gone.

Nanaji was in perfect health - the previous day, he had walked several miles to get the mango plant. After he spoke to his brother, he said *"My time has come"*, lay down on the bed, and said *"Sat Sri Akaal"* to everyone sitting around him. He then pulled the sheet up to his face and said *"Waheguru"*. He was gone. Mamiji said that when they were taking his body for cremation, it was an extremely hot summer day, and the sun was beating down. Suddenly, a cloud appeared in the sky and created shade over the body and the people who were carrying it.

Nanaji passed away in July 1974. I was in the UK at the time. Hardev had been lucky enough to meet him, touch his feet, and receive his blessing, when we visited India in 1973.

Nanaji was the first person in the village to receive Amrit, and always maintained the 5 K's throughout his life after that. He also started the Anand Karaj ceremony in the village, as prior to this everyone was performing the Hindu style weddings.



**Nanaji.**

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **My Life in India**

I was just about two years old when Pitaji had had enough of India and wanted to go to Africa. He had heard stories about life in Africa by Grandfather. Two of his cousins were already in Nairobi, Kenya. The only problem was he did not have enough money for the sea fare. He had to take a train to Bombay on the western coast of India and then go by ship to Mombasa. Beeji came to the rescue and she handed him her jewellery which was all gold. He sold the jewellery and made enough money to get to Africa.

Beeji was left with my sister, now five years old and myself, aged two. It was decided that she should spend most of her time with her own family in Saundha. She would get appropriate moral and financial support from Nanaji.

Pitaji reached Mombasa by steam ship. He did not want any help from his cousins as he was always independent minded. He took the train to Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and reached a port township called Lindi. He worked there for two years and then returned to the village. This was common in those days. The men folk would go away and work for periods of two years



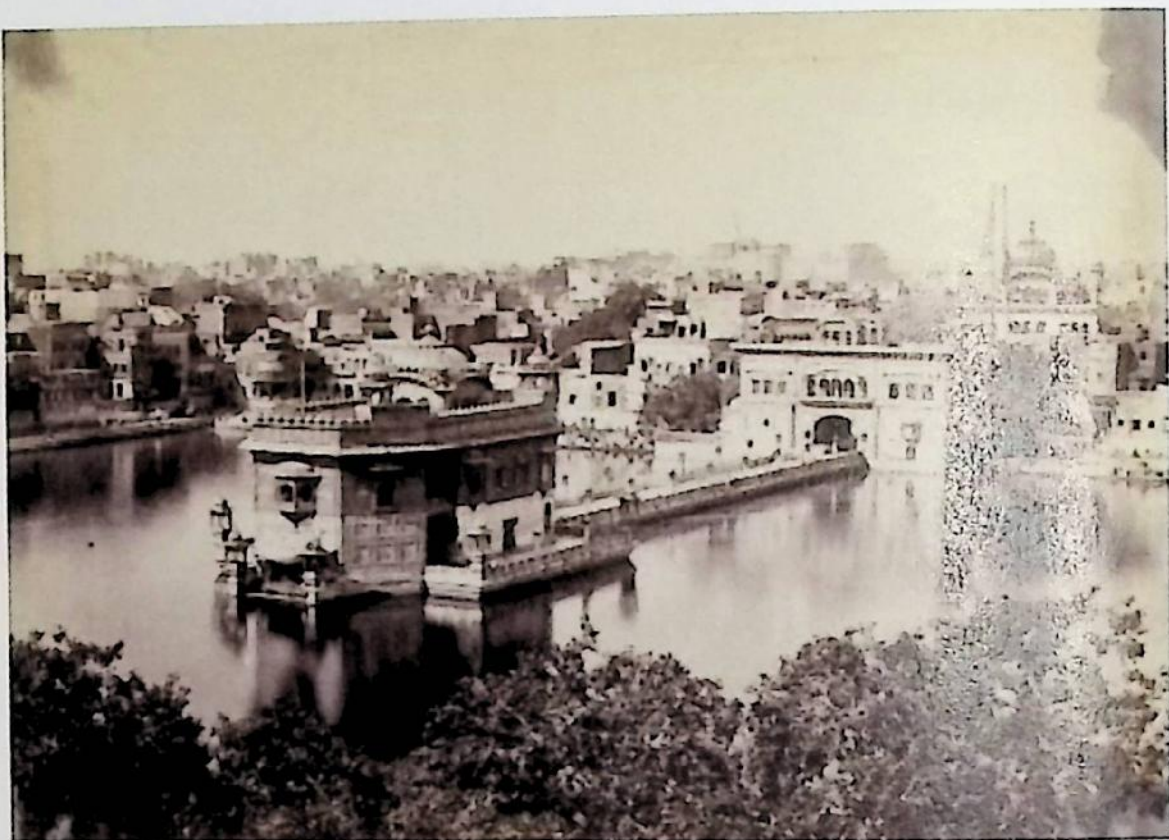
at a time and then return home to be back with the family till money ran out.



**Mombasa - Lindi,  
956km on modern  
roads.**

Pitaji's brother's family made up with him, but they were still quite envious of him.

I do not remember most of this time except that Beeji joined some other relatives and we went to Amritsar to see the Golden Temple. Evidently, Pitaji had gone there before my birth to pray to Guru Ji for a son. So, it was a thanksgiving visit to the temple. I still have some vague memories of that visit.



**Harmandir Sahib, circa 1940**

Pitaji stayed in India for two years working in nearby cities. In 1940 -1941, he decided to return to Africa. This time, his elder brother's son, who was only a couple of years younger to him, (Karnail Singh), accompanied him. These two got on well with each other. Karnail Singh's father had died while he was a teenager. Pitaji was like a father/elder brother to him. Karnail Singh had also been working since the young age of 12 after his father had died. He supported his mother and two younger brothers.

This time, they both worked in Nairobi. The Second World War had started. They worked in a company that made vehicles for the British forces in Africa. Pitaji became a "Mistry", or a person in charge of workers involved in vehicle production. Karnail



Singh also worked with him. After they had been working for about two years, he heard that sister Rajo's husband had died of typhoid in India, so he had to come home.

Both Pitaji and Karnail Singh went to Mombasa by train. They could not get a steam ship to take them to Bombay. All the ships were impounded by the British government for the war effort. There were some other men with them who wanted to go back at the same time. They negotiated with an Arab who owned a sailing ship (dhow) to take them to India.

Some people known to us were in that group. There was Niranjana Singh, "Granthi", who later became sister Banso's father-in-law. Each person had to be responsible for his own food on the ship. So, they bought flour, dhals, and spices etc. Some charcoal braziers were also brought for cooking on the ship. The ship's captain was responsible for supplying fresh water.

It was smooth sailing for about three weeks. Then suddenly, the wind stopped. This evidently is not uncommon in the tropics. The dhow would not move. They soon had to ration drinking water and it came to one glass of water per person per day. No bathing was allowed unless one washed with sea



water. The sailors were Muslim, and they prayed hard for the wind to start.

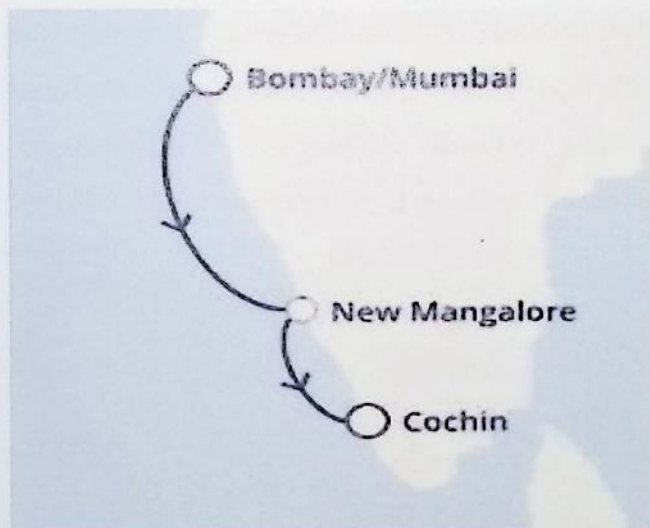
The captain spoke to the passengers one morning and explained that the situation was dire. They were running very short of water and food. He said that the crew had been praying for the winds but that nothing had happened! So, he asked the passengers to pray to their Gods and see if some miracle could happen. The Hindus then started their prayers, playing musical instruments in accompaniment. They did this for two days and nothing happened. They finally approached the Sikh passengers and asked them to say their prayers.

The next morning the Sikhs asked the passengers to donate one handful of flour each for Prashad, which they made at about 4am in the morning. The journey being so long, they had carried with them the instruments for Kirtan on the ship. They recited the Japji Sahib Parth and then Gurbani Kirtan. This was concluded with Ardaas. They prayed for the Guruji's help in this difficult situation.

Donation was collected by Niranjan Singh. He was chosen to go to Hazoor Sahib if they reached India safely and he was to present the donation to the Gurdwara. They asked for Guru Ji's Blessing for the safe sailing of the ship with all its passengers.

I was told by more than one person who was on that dhow that as soon as Ardaas finished, a slow wind started blowing and it soon became strong enough to sail the ship.

The wind blew the dhow several hundred kilometres towards India, but instead of reaching Bombay as planned, they landed much further south at a port called Cochin on the south west coast of India. The last few days were spent without water. They all thanked God as soon as they were on land.



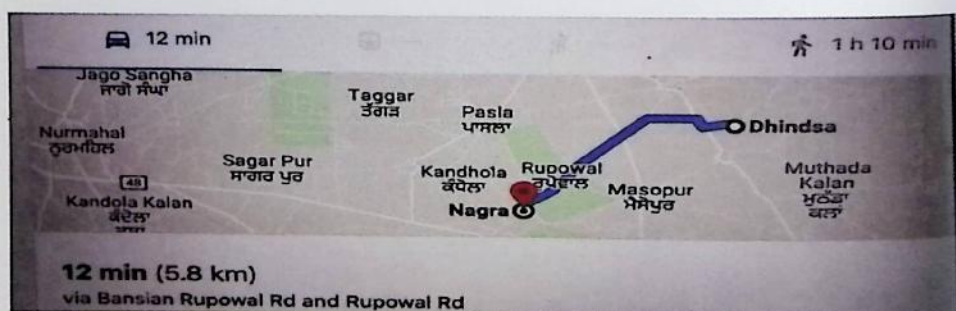
**Bombay - Cochin,  
a distance of  
1,336 km.**

Beeji told me that it took three months for the journey from Mombasa to home. Pitaji's hair was all sticky and tightly stuck to his scalp. It took her days to disentangle the hair using hot water and soap. I was about five years old by then. I felt happy when all the family was together. My half-sister was remarried soon after Pitaji was home.

## Schooling in Dhindsa

In Pitaji's absence we had spent most of our time in Saundha with occasional visits to Dhindsa.

It was time for me to go to school, I was five years old. I remember Beeji had sewn a new shirt for me for this occasion. The school chosen was in the next village of Nagra where all our village students went. I think Pitaji went to this school. Pitaji accompanied me to the school on the first day. We went on his bicycle and after that I had to walk about 5-6 km in company of the village boys. Girls were not allowed to go to school, so my sister never went to school.



I was placed in Year One. There were boys from neighbouring villages also. I was the only boy starting school from our village that year. I had a cousin who was four years older than me, who was in Year 3. He called me to one side and told me that I should not be frightened, because I was frightened.



There were 20 other boys who all looked older than me. One boy was quite tall, and he had the beginnings of a beard. He was in Class One! There were no age barriers. If one did not pass the test, then they had to repeat and could spend more than a year in Class One. Older boys invariably bullied the younger ones. My cousin had reassured me that he would "deal" with anybody who threatened me in any way. Younger boys' lunch was often grabbed by the older ones.

The students had to sit on a long mat on the floor. The teacher sat on a chair at one end of the class. I sat in the middle of the row. I do not remember anyone teaching us anything. The teacher would sit on the chair and tell us to sit quietly. Now and then he chose an older boy to make us repeat the Urdu alphabet after him, and sometimes counting numbers up to 10!

The first week was uneventful. No-one grabbed my lunch and threatened me in any way. No-one was particularly friendly either. For water, we had to go to a small well. One had to push a long pole to turn the wheel which then brought water up to the surface and it would flow into an earthen pipe. You had to drink it while it was still flowing. It really needed at least two people. One to push the pole and turn the wheel while the other one drank the water. You had to do this in turns. It was a hot day and I wanted to drink water. I had nobody to help me. My

cousin was nowhere to be seen. I tried to push the pole. The idea was to get the water up and then run to the pipe before all the water spilled to the ground. No easy task! In these manoeuvres I fell and ended up with a swollen lip and no success with the water!

Another week passed and I was not entirely happy!

The third week I had a brain wave that I should be sitting near the teacher at the end of the mat. This was the place where the bearded student sat. He was also a bit lame. I think he had polio when he was younger. When half time break came, I quickly had a snack ( $\frac{1}{2}$  a roti) and came and sat at the head of the mat. The other students came to sit, and I could hear them sniggering. I did not know why! The teacher usually came later. The boy whose spot I had taken came in and saw me sitting in his place. He was livid and full of rage that I had sat in his place. Without even telling me to move, he gave me a resounding slap on my cheek and pushed me off the mat!!

I thought this was the time to go for help from my cousin, Harnam Singh, who was in Class 3 by now and four years older than me. Harnam was one of Badan Singh's sons. He saw me crying and came running to me. I told him that a boy in my class had slapped me and pushed me around. He was visibly angry and

said, "Show me that boy and I will thrash him and break his arms!" I felt proud of him. I took him where my class was sitting and pointed to the boy who had slapped me. My cousin took one look at him and his face turned pale! He said, "That lame boy?" I said "Yes".

"Oh, oh, don't worry, you will be alright. I can't beat that boy because all the boys from his village are twice the size and if I beat him, all the other boys will beat both of us to a pulp!" He walked away. By then, the teacher arrived. I had not given up! The teacher should punish this boy. The teacher always carried a big stick with him. So, I went to him and started telling him, "Sir, that boy...." "What boy?? Do you want me to beat you with my stick?? Go and sit on the mat!" So that was that. I swallowed my pride. My classmates, on the other hand, were laughing!

The following week we were told that Government people were coming to poke painful needles into our arms the next day. We were all frightened. In fact, public health workers were coming to vaccinate us. So, all the village boys decided not to attend school that day. That was fine with me. I was getting fed up with school. So, I told Beeji that I did not want to go to school anymore! I had no friends and was scared. Luckily during this time, I developed a swelling on my left lower jaw. It was painful.



Pitaji, I think, had gone overseas again or was working in another city.

News spread to the neighbours and relatives in the village that I was not well. So old ladies came to talk to Beeji for support and with various suggestions as to the treatment.

The first line of treatment was to get rid of the “Nazar” (evil eye) which must have caused this affliction. So, the local soothsayer was brought in. She said some magic words and threw green chillies onto the fire, while I had to inhale the smoke. That caused violent coughing and watery eyes. We waited, nothing happened for days. The swelling was becoming larger and more painful. Soon after that a visiting village “doctor” came to our village. Beeji took me to him. He looked at my jaw and said that it is easy to treat. “He has bad blood in the side of the jaw, this has to be removed.” He had the necessary implements for it.

I really got worried. This was worse than going to school!! The doctor told me not to worry, that the treatment is not painful and would not cost much. He took out three leeches from a tin and asked me to open my mouth wide and keep it open until all the bad blood had been sucked out by the leeches! By this time, I was screaming.

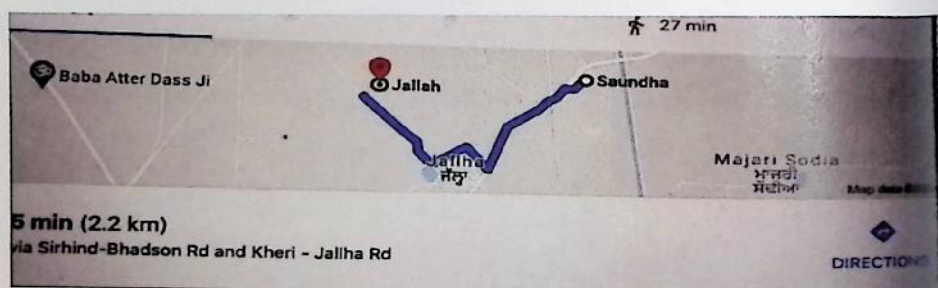
Beeji put me in her lap and cradled me and promised me several lumps of hardened sugar (mishery) after the treatment. That consoled me a little. There was no escape as the doctor's assistant held me tightly and opened my mouth. The doctor very deftly put the leeches inside my mouth and attached them to the lining of my mouth between my tongue and jaw. I do not know how I survived that! Eventually the leeches were removed. They were several times bigger than the original size and full of my precious blood.

More days passed and nothing changed. The oldies suggested that I should be taken to a holy man for "*matha take*" and that may help.

Pitaji came home and said, "We have to take him to a doctor in the city". He took me to a qualified doctor, who said it was a dental abscess. "We have to remove that offending tooth", which was promptly done. I survived that without anaesthetic! To console me, Pitaji bought some mangoes for me and we rode back home on his bicycle. The jaw healed within a few days.

I also once had an injury to my eye whilst playing. Some healing man put oil drops into a pond and said, "Can you see a rainbow?" to which I replied yes. He then read a mantrar and said, "You'll be alright." It worked!!

Schooling was still a problem! It was decided that since in Pitaji's absence, we had lived in Saundha, Nanaji's village, that I should be put in a school near that village. I had friends there and some of the village boys were of my age. Moreover, my "Mamaji", Beeji's cousin who was only four years older than me, went to that school.



**Saundha - Jallah, a 30 min walk**

This school was in the village of Jallah, about 2 kms from Saundha. Nanaji was well known in that area. The teacher knew of him and I would be safe there. So, we went to Saundha.

Pitaji decided to go to Africa again. Beeji, myself and my sister went to live at Nanaji's house in Saundha. I was put into the school in Jallah. Girls were not sent to school. They were taught Punjabi at home by the older members of the family. All the village boys would usually go to school in a group. We walked to school every day.



I had two other boys my own age who went to the same school and were in my class. My best friend was a boy called Maghar Singh. His father had joined the British army and had not come home for years. The second world war was on.

My brother, Bans was born in 1941, one year before I started school. Before Bans was born, another girl was born when I was about two years old, before Pitaji went to Africa for the first time. This girl, unfortunately, died of a high fever (malaria?) when she was only three months old. Surprisingly, I remember her last day. I remember Beeji was sitting on the floor with this baby in her lap and she was reading Sukhmani Sahib from a small booklet. I sat next to her. I have no memory of her after that. She would have died that night. She was named Mohinder Kaur.

Harbans was born in Dhindsa. I also remember the day he was born. There were other relatives in the house. My Mamaji, Beeji's cousin, came down from Saundha.

## Life in Saundha

Pitaji decided to go back to Africa after I started school in Saundha. We all moved there to live with Nanaji's family. They had a big house, there were two large bedrooms on the first floor. People slept wherever they wanted to. The two younger brothers of Nanaji mostly worked away from home and came back off and on.

Nanaji's middle brother, Nand Singh, was a skilled builder/carpenter. His wife died soon after Bans was born. They had one son, Mamaji, Amar Singh, and two daughters, Satya and Sarjito. Youngest Nanaji had two daughters, Masi Bachani who was married, and Masi Sodha. The latter got married to a family in Sirhind and went to live with them. Her husband's family had a steel rolling mill and were quite well off. Masi Satya was about Bhainji's age and they played together. Masi Sarjito later married and moved to Delhi. She was a little younger than me.

One Diwali morning I was making my own candles from left-over wax which had dripped from candles that were lit the night before, when Masi Sarjito bent down to see if my candles were lit. Her hair caught fire! She screamed, everyone came running and the fire was doused. I was severely reprimanded, even though it was an accident.

I was a rather wild, strong-willed kid. I went to school because all the other boys went to school. One day I pretended to be sick and did not go to school. I was bored and annoyed everybody at home. Nanaji was very patient. He was home because he was doing some work. That was the only time he was angry with me because I did not go to school.

School was okay in Jallah. Nobody bullied me. The village boys supported each other. I was not really happy going to school. Beeji encouraged me a lot with promises of presents. Nanaji also emphasised the value of a good education. He would say that uneducated people had to work hard days in and out to earn a living while educated people sat in cosy offices and made money.

Nanaji bought agricultural produce in the villages and sold it in the city. He would load it on his bullock cart. From time-to-time Mamaji and I went with him. We often had to sleep in the cart.





Nanaji would at times take us to eat in a wayside restaurant (Dhaba). Two pesas (pennies) could buy a good meal.



A Dhaba along a highway

Nanaji always kept a spear and a long axe in the cart with him when travelling. He told us stories that robbers had tried to rob him when he was travelling at night. The spear and the axe saved him each time.

Summer holidays were two months and long and hot. At times I had to take the buffalos out to feed them in the fields. I would join a group of boys who had their own stock to feed. We often played in the village pond while the buffalo were grazing.

Teachers at school were very strict and often cruel. They did not believe in sparing the rod. We had to learn tables and read Urdu. They beat this into us. I can still read Urdu! If a boy did not do his homework, there was collective punishment. All the village boys had to stay behind after school until the homework was

done. This was in addition to individual punishment. The worst punishment was to bend a person over and make him hold his ears by passing arms under the knees. Some boys could do this for hours. I usually did just about enough work to escape punishment. Mamaji, of course, used to help me with homework from time to time.

We did not write on paper - there was none up to third class. Each student had a flat wooden board "*fatti*", about 12 inches by 24 inches. After writing on it with charcoal or homemade ink, we had to wash the *fatti* and cover it with a special white mud called "*gajni*", then put it in the sun to dry for the next day.

At lunch time we ate our rotis, usually with saag or left-over vegetable curry from the previous night. There were copious amounts of achaar to go with it.

There was no school uniform. You wore what you had. Most students had no shoes and went bare feet, winter and summer. I had shoes, but would not wear them, because my friends didn't wear shoes. We still never felt in need of anything. The demand was less, so our needs were less.

One day school inspectors from the city were going to visit the school. We were told to be on our best behaviour. Boys who did not know their maths and reading were hidden away in case the inspectors picked one of them to answer questions.

When the day of inspections came, four students were asked to climb the roof or the nearby tall tree to warn everybody that the inspector was nearby. He always came on a mare but came from different directions each time so that he could surprise the teachers and be there before they cleared the place up and hid poorly performing pupils. The inspector only looked at classes 4 and 5 students. We were happy not to be tested by the inspector.

Some of the teachers encouraged village children to bring saag, sugar cane and corn cobs for them otherwise they would not get good marks in their examination results. Lots of students tried to miss school. They were often dobbed in by their friends. Excuses like "Sir, it was raining in my village and there was a flood" did not work!

There were no Games periods or any other entertainment. At times visiting performers called Raasdhari's would come and perform scenes from Ramayan. Then we would all attend, usually at night.



School was a very boring place, no-one liked it. There was no fun. Teachers were cruel and often punished students for minor misbehaviour. We were always trying to find ways of not going to school. Now and then, one could miss a day if he were sick.

I remember once I had a slight fever, it could have been mild flu or malaria. It was not serious. I was feeling a bit off and told Beeji that I did not want to go to school because I was not feeling well. To my surprise she relented and said, "Okay but you cannot play around, get into the bed and stay there until you feel better". I was so glad to hear that. So, I lay on a bed and pretended to be sicker than I was.

News of my not being well spread in the village and old ladies started to come for my "*Khabar*" and advise Beeji on further management. They sat around my bed and started telling Beeji what to do. Things like treatment of bad *Nazar* (evil eye) were mentioned. They told stories of how so and so's son of my age had the same disease and had to be taken to the city doctors for 'injections'.

I had a brain wave! this was an opportunity to cut school for at least one week! So, I started moaning and said, "There are snakes under my bed". The ladies really got excitable and said

I was delirious and that was like another boy in the next village who nearly died. I was so happy that the trick was working.

The ladies gave more advice and left and promised to call again the next day. Beeji patiently listened to these old ladies and politely agreed with all they said as was the custom in the village. One could not be rude to the old wise ladies. As soon as they left, she looked at me severely and said "Stop pretending now, I know you are well, you are not that ill. You will go to school tomorrow!" Well, that did not work did it?

Some weeks later we found that a boy from the neighbouring village had stayed home for three full days. He did not look that ill. We tried to ask him how he managed that. At first, he refused to tell us but under pressure relented and agreed to tell us provided we shared our lunch with him for one week and did his homework! He made us promise an 'oath of death' that we would not reveal his secret to anyone especially to the boys from his village. We all agreed and moved to a remote corner of the playground and sat around him. He began his tale.

"I had a mild sore throat one day. I told my mother that I was coming down with a fever. I sat in the hot sun (it was summer in Punjab) and started rubbing my eyes. I did that for about 20 minutes until my eyes were sore then I went to my mother and



said look, I am hot. She looked at me and said, "you must be quite sick, your eyes are all red!" She was worried. "Get into the bed straight away", she said. I was very compliant! She called the neighbour and sent them to get the village "Hakim" straight away. Whenever my mother looked away, I rubbed my eyes a little more.

The Hakim came and checked my pulse and asked me if I was constipated! To cut it short he diagnosed me to have had bad "Nazar" (evil eye) exposure and said I had eaten a rotten mango! He gave my mother a clay pot full of a foul-smelling liquid which I had to take three times a day. If I started vomiting, she should ignore it as that was the mango poison working its way out! I had not eaten a mango for weeks! I took the medicine for one day. It was bitter and foul tasting and it made me vomit! I lost all sense of taste after two days. I told my mother I had improved and wanted to go to school! She gave me the medicine for one more day against my violent protestations! I am so glad I am at school; the medicine would have killed me!"

That information was no use to us. Nobody wanted to take that medicine. In any case, every boy in school soon found out what had happened. The poor boy was punished by the teachers.



One year there was a drought in the area. No rain for months. A yogi appeared in the village in his saffron clothes and long rosaries around his neck. He said he can bring rain to the village. So, he was given a special house to stay in. He would close his eyes and read his mantras loudly. People were impressed with him and gave him fruit and good food, kheer, etc. This lasted a few weeks, but no rain.

Then a man was passing through the village who recognised this man as actually having escaped from prison! Prisoners had to shave their heads in prison. When they were released, they became Sadhus to blend in so that they were not questioned about their baldness. One could not distinguish between an ex-prisoner and a Sadhu! Hence that's why villagers got conned. When the villagers realised this, they were very angry and went to beat him up.

This fellow had been clever and had escaped the previous night. The villagers wanted to catch him and punish him for misleading the people. Then one person came out of the house and said there was no point in following him as they would not be able to catch the false yogi as he had done a shit in the cooking area and that was considered a sign that he will not be caught! So, the chase was given up! And still no rain!

Life in Saundha was fun. There were quite a few boys my age to play with . The village was safe. We often played late after sunset and nobody worried. I fell from a tree once and I think I had a greenstick fracture of the right tibia! The local bone setter was called in. He gave me a special oil which I had to put on my leg and keep the leg in hot sun for two hours every day. It was a hot summer; 40 degrees was not unusual! I refused to put my leg in the sun unless Beeji also put her leg in the sun. Poor Beeji. She duly did all that until my leg was better.

A travelling astrologer came to the village. There was a lot of excitement and everybody showed his hand. There was no fee, just voluntary donation of atta/pulses etc. Beeji showed my hand. He looked at my hand for a long time and said I had a lucky hand. He read that I will have daughters and will not be short of money after the age of 15 years. Beeji took it quite seriously. I bet he told similar stories to all the other parents.

There were always travelling salesmen. They would come with their goods loaded on donkeys, or some had bicycles. They would sell articles of clothing, spices, jewellery etc. Villagers paid in wheat, pulses, sugar cane etc. No cash was available. One old man brought a big earthen jar full of achaar, which was very tasty. Everybody bought it. I remember the man had a

constantly runny nose which he wiped with his hand and then used the same hand to take achaar out of the earthen pot!!

The Punjab village was a microcosm of Indian society at large. Each village had a self-sufficient economic structure, based upon the bartering system. There were various groups of people in the village which had their own skill set, and with each group responsible for their own products and services, a village essentially did not require things from outside. One's birth decided whether one was high or low caste.

Social structure, which was highly caste ridden, and been so for at least 3000 years, was based on these skill sets. The Harijans, the 'untouchables', were at the lowest rung of society. They performed tasks which nobody else wanted to do, like cleaning and other menial jobs. They were often employed as farmhands and looked after the village cattle. They were not allowed to enter temples.

Guru Nanak Devji was against this caste system and had condemned it, saying that all humans were equal, and a person should be judged high or low from his actions, not his birth.

The next group were the Chamaars who were the cobblers making shoes and other leather goods for the village. They dealt



with dead animals and used their skin in their work. Some would go to other villages to sell anything that was not sold in their village.

The Khatri families were involved in running small shops where they sold spices and other knick knacks.

There were always a few Muslim families, the Telees, who were involved in working on the land, extracting oil from cotton seeds. Some of them did small-scale farming for vegetables and fruits and some owned goats which were used for meat and milk.

The large-scale farmers, the Jatts, were always in majority. They tilled the land and grew wheat, maize, barley, sugar cane, et cetera for the villagers - the payment was always via the barter system.

There would also always be a family of Naais, barbers, who also worked as messengers to convey news among the villages.

Every village also invariably had a Soothsayer who would recite his mantras to treat the sick villagers.

The Brahmin would perform all ceremonies of birth, death, engagements, and marriage. They also advised on the most

appropriate date and time for all functions in the village. Wednesdays were good days for achieving success in any venture if the Brahmin sanctioned it!

The Tarkhans, (Ramgharias), were blacksmiths, carpenters, and builders. They made bullock carts, repaired houses, and repaired and manufactured farm implements for the farmers. They also sometimes did minor surgeries like incising boils or extracting loose teeth! I once saw Pitaji extracting a tooth from somebody with a pair of pliers.

Thus, each village was totally independent and self-sufficient. The Village Head (Lambardar) who was mostly a landowner, would uphold the law and order in the village. Government officials issued orders to the villagers through the Lambardar. It was quite an important position. Disputes between villagers were resolved by this person.

Children were married into nearby villages so that the journey could be easily covered before nightfall. The furthest anyone went was judged by the length of one day, so an acceptable journey was considered that which could be made between sunrise and sundown.

There were also always visiting salesmen who brought their wares on donkey carts or bicycles. They sold articles like aachaar, cosmetics and bangles to the villagers and were paid with grain, jaggery, or wheat flour.

There was no shortage of entertainment. Hijraas (transvestites) would arrive in their colourful costumes and perform in front of the villagers. We children always looked forward to their visits. They came to dance and sing Lorhi to a house when a child was born and demanded presents for their service. Beeji told me that they came to our house when I was born. Pitaji gave them one silver rupee (a big sum then), and some clothes. They sang blessings and eulogised our ancestors. They would also turn up to dance at weddings.

Then they were the Rasdharis who would come and perform scenes from the Ramayan at night-time. Again, the payment to the entertainers was done with local produce.

Every year or two bands of gypsies used to visit our village. They came in their mobile homes pulled by donkeys or oxen. We used to call them "*Gaddian vale*". They would come and establish the camp outside the village. They all wore colourful robes and all kinds of jewellery. They made small kitchen items, like tongs, tawas and small knives which they sold to the villagers. They



also sharpened any blunt knives and scissors. They were quite skilled in metalwork.

They always had an old lady with them who would read our palms and pretend to predict future events. They would camp outside the village, arranging their mobile homes in a circular fashion with an open central area in the middle for their families where they cooked their meals and sang and danced at night.

The gypsies had a reputation of being skilful thieves. The village head used to put the village on high alert! We had to make sure the windows and doors were securely locked at night. People had to watch their belongings all the time. My masi used to tell me that they also steal young children! We were not allowed to go near them unaccompanied. There was always that element of fear among the children. Nothing seriously untoward happened.

People were always wary of their "curses". It was believed that if you annoyed a gypsy and he threw a curse at you then you would surely suffer. There was a story of a farmer in the village who had refused to pay enough for an article he bought from the gypsy. The gypsy cursed him and in a few weeks the man developed a big painful boil on his foot! Coincidence?!

Mention must be made of a village custom of 'Siyappa', or 'mourning the dead'. It involved a lot of wailing. Now, in modern times, the word means "creating trouble". When a person died in a village the old ladies would go to the deceased's house for Siyappa.

Somebody had died in our village and one day Beeji told me not to go to such and such street in the village because there was a Siyappa there. I was totally intrigued! So, despite her warnings, I did go to that street and looked through the doorway of the house where they were doing Siyappa. It was frightening. They had called the Harijaan crier lady to lead the Siyappa. She would scream loudly and cry and say some sentences in praise of the dead person, and then in unison all the old ladies hit their thighs with their palms and wailed loudly. It was the most disturbing thing I had ever seen. I had nightmares for weeks! That's for disobeying your mother!! Fortunately, this emotion has disappeared now.

In Kenya, when I was young, people went to the deceased's house and sat on the floor and expressed their grief to the family.

I remember an incident in Nairobi! Ladies had gone to express grief to the family and sat on the floor. There was a small table in the room on which the owners had placed a clock to check the

time. One lady who was sitting near the table picked up the clock and hid it under her dress. She tied the clock with her salwar string (nala) to hold it secure for when she was going to leave the house.

Soon after that somebody asked the owner for the time. She said look at the clock on the table. They all looked at but there was no clock! "Hai!", "Hai!" "Somebody has stolen the clock!". One lady said it could be the African houseboy. "But he has not been in this room". Then everybody sat quietly, some made remarks that house boys are thieves these days and one must be careful.

Soon it was time to go and all the ladies stood up to leave the house. It was 3 o'clock; it turned out that the alarm had also been set to 3 o'clock - soon enough the alarm started ringing!!! The clock was found!!

Masi Sodha was married when I was starting Class 3. There was a big wedding. The wedding party stayed for four days - Nanaji spent a lot of money on their wedding. It was decided by the elders that middle Nanaji should get married as the girls will marry and move away. A permanent female figure was needed in the house. So, a girl was found for him. She was much younger than him. She came into the house but could not settle



in the large family. So, second Nanaji lived in a separate house next door with his wife. The cordial relationship between brothers disappeared and they stopped talking to each other.

Three years passed by and I was in 3rd class when Pitaji and Karnail Singh came back from Africa. Beeji, Bhainji and Bans moved to Dhindsa.

Pitaji demolished the old house and built a new family home for us. I stayed in Saundha because of my schooling. Pitaji stayed at home for about a year.

Unbeknown to me, he and Karnail Singh had applied to the Kenyan Government to take their families to Kenya with them on their next trip to Africa.

## CHAPTER 5

### India to Kenya

World War 2 had just ended and the British Government wanted to expand and build their colonies in Africa. So, they encouraged Indian workers to settle permanently in East Africa. The East African Railway was completed with the invaluable help of Indian workers.

I was so happy when I heard we were going to Africa! I was fed up with school in Jallah. So, in July 1946 we left the village and travelled to Bombay by train. It took three days to reach Bombay.

*Samrala to Bombay, a distance of 1,695km*



We were picked up from the station by the travel agents and taken to their halfway house in the city. The agent's name was Lal Devi, she was large woman who wore a lot of jewellery and appeared to be extraordinarily rich.

We were put into a large room with other families where we occupied one corner of the room. Karnail Singh and his family had arrived earlier. They caught a ship to Kenya after a few days of our arrival in Bombay. We had to wait for the next ship, which took a month to arrive!

### **Bombay in the 1950's**

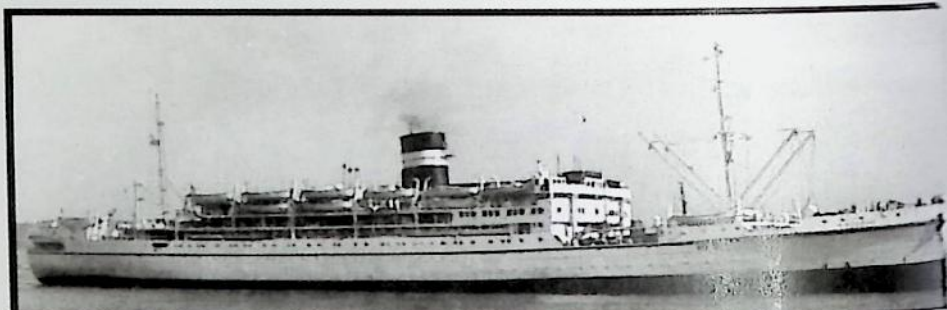


One month in the large city of Bombay was quite an eye opener for me. I had never seen a large city - Ludhiana was a village compared to the city. I also saw a white man for the first time! They looked so pale

compared to the Indians. "*They should be respected*", Pitaji used to say. I was only eight or nine years old. Pitaji encouraged me to go to the shops by myself. People spoke Hindi. I was okay with that because I knew Urdu which is spoken the same way. I could go quite far into the city to post letters and I became quite confident. Good for a "wild" village boy and I learnt how to count change. I was amazed to see how big the ocean was. There were big ships in the harbour. There was a big steam ship full of white soldiers. They were on their way back to the UK as the war had just ended.



Our ship came at last! It was called the "SS Karanja"



The SS Karanja

A day before sailing, we went to the shops and bought provisions for cooking on the ship. Those who were rich, bought tickets for full board which included meals. Pitaji said we would not be eating anything for the first few days because of sea sickness and it would be a waste of money to pay for meals we would not be able to eat. A big cane basket of oranges was also bought to eat on the ship as well as some charcoal and coal burning stoves.

The SS Karanja used to be a ship used for transporting cattle, sheep etc. It was quickly modified to carry passengers.

Finally, our name was called, and we walked up the ramp with our luggage. We were all excited! I was thrilled to be on the ship going to Africa at last. It was August now, which was the peak of the Monsoon season. A season of high winds and big waves.

We occupied a space on the deck. People put their things wherever they could get space. There were no cabins on this ship. We had to sleep on the deck. We had to wake up early to put our things on a raised platform as the sailors came with their hoses to clean the deck.

The first day was good, I stood watching the waves. Then trouble started, severe sea sickness. Everybody around was vomiting their guts out. The sea was rough, and the ship rocked a lot. Bhainji and I were the worst affected. Each time we tried to stand we were violently sick. We could not look at food for ten days.

Then the ship reached the Islands of Seychelles and stopped for one day. There was no harbour, so the ship just stopped in the middle of the ocean. People from the islands came in their boats to sell fruit and trinkets to the passengers. We did not buy anything.

The ship's toilet was a long metal trench, a wide iron pipe cut longitudinally in half. One end opened on each end of the ship, so there was a constant flow of sea water from one end of the ship to the other. There were little cubicles with platforms to sit on while answering calls of nature.

When our systems had settled enough to eat something, we realised the neighbours had eaten all our oranges! They stole a few every night while we were sleeping.

After about 15 days or so the ship reached the Port of Mombasa in Kenya and I saw Africa for the first time.



**Mombasa  
Harbour,  
1950's**

OLD MOMBASA HARBOUR

SEP 15 1950

We disembarked in the morning. The Sikh temple had sent a horse driven cart to collect the luggage of Sikh passengers and take it to the Gurdwara.

We had to walk to the Gurdwara. It must have been at least 5km and it was quite tiring as the sea sickness had weakened us all.

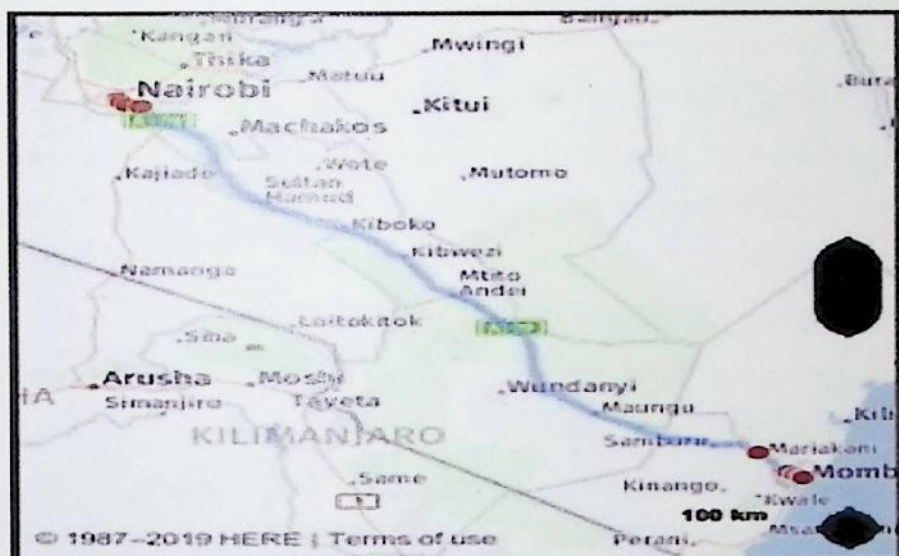
**Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Mombasa**





We stayed at the Gurdwara for two days, then boarded a train to Nairobi. So did the other migrants.

**Mombasa – Nairobi, 615km.**



**Nairobi Railway Station**

The train reached Nairobi railway station after two days. Pitaji had written to his cousin in Nairobi to pick us up from the station. (His cousin was Deesho's father's elder brother. Deesho is my cousin).

Pitaji had the train tickets in a wallet together with 200 Kenyan shillings. The only money we had. An African stole the wallet from Pitaji's coat pocket while he was off-loading the luggage. When we reached the exit gate, the station master asked for the train tickets. Then it was realised that the wallet was missing.

Luckily Pitaji was able to get through after his cousin talked to the station master. Pitaji's cousin, Budh Singh had come to meet us at the Nairobi railway station. He was able to convince the station master in Nairobi that Pitaji was his cousin and he would not have boarded the train in Mombasa without a ticket. Eventually we were able to leave the railway station and go to Budh Singh's house in Nairobi. He and his partner Ram Singh had a timber sawing mill in Nairobi, and they were well off.



**Budh Singh,  
on the left,  
with his  
cousin  
Prem Singh.**

The next day Pitaji went to Nakuru, 150km north of Nairobi, to look for a job. Why he chose Nakuru, I have no idea. I should have asked him.

Pitaji's cousin wanted us to stay longer in Nairobi, but Pitaji did not want any obligation - always independent!! He came back the next day, job all fixed, and we caught a bus to Nakuru.



**Nairobi to Nakuru, approx. 150km.**

Nakuru lies 150km north of Nairobi. It is on the main highway and on the main railway line going north as far as Kampala in Uganda.

A few days before we had left for Africa, Pitaji and Beeji called me sounding very mysterious. We climbed to the mezzanine floor of the house and Pitaji had partly hollowed out an area in



the wall. There were about 100 silver rupees which Pitaji placed in this hollowed out area. Then he covered the wall with mud and cement, so that no-one could tell that there was a small treasure hidden in the wall. I was shown this in case something happened to them. (I was touched). This money was to be used for emergency situations or just for future security when we returned to India. The plan had been to spend about five years in Kenya and then be back in the village.

This money was retrieved from the wall when Amrik and Beeji went back to India in 1953. The rupees were high grade silver and were worth much more than the face value of a rupee. They would have been a collector's item worth something now! Beeji gave them to Nanaji to convert them to the local currency at that time and because they were worth quite a bit of money, it helped Beeji and Meekay for expenditures while they were in India. They did not have much money when they had left Kenya on their trip to India. We could not afford much. They travelled back and forth on a steam ship.

Amrik had quite a severe attack of Hepatitis A on return to Kenya. He was almost delirious but fortunately recovered within a few weeks.

# **LIFE IN AFRICA**

## **School Life and Early Years in Nakuru**

Pitaji was in such a hurry to get away from Nairobi that he fixed his job but did not arrange any accommodation for the family - five of us. Fortunately, the local Gurdwara had some rooms and we were given one room to stay in temporarily until more permanent accommodation could be found.

It was exceedingly difficult to rent rooms in Nakuru at that time. There were only a few houses and they belonged to Gujarati businessmen. They did not rent their rooms to Sikhs - saying Sikhs eat meat and are violent! There were no houses owned by Sikhs.

The majority of Sikh families lived in railway quarters provided by the East African Railways. These were allocated to their permanent staff who had worked for them for quite a few years. One room living in the Gurdwara did not worry me. I was all excited to be in a new country! I had been terribly bored in India. I wanted to learn English and Swahili as soon as possible.

We stayed in the Gurdwara for three months. I secretly read Gurbani from the Guru Granth Sahib, when no one was around.

I was eventually caught. There was no permanent Granthi at the Gurdwara at the time.

We had arrived early August and it was still school holidays for a few weeks. I found my way to the town which was only 1½ km from the Gurdwara. Pitaji established an account with a grocer, they were all Gujaratis. The advantage was that they allowed you to buy groceries on credit until a person received his wages at the end of the month, and the account was cleared.

Pitaji worked in a furniture workshop, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. He was paid 1.5 shillings per hour. We managed nicely, things were cheap, and our demands were minimal. Most people lived frugally. The Second World War had just ended and there was not much work around.

#### Local Currency





## Gurdwara in Nakuru



**SIKH TEMPLE NAKURU**  
**FRONT VIEW**



**GURU NANAK HALL**

Donald Avenue, Nakuru in the 1950's



*Donald Avenue*

*Nakuru*

Soon the school term started. Pitaji was busy so he asked another person who used to teach Punjabi in Gurdwara to take me to school on the first day. I was all excited. This man took me to the Headmaster's office.

The Headmaster looked like a nice man. He started filling out the admission form. "What is your date of birth?" he asked. I hadn't the faintest idea! So, I looked at him blankly and shrugged my shoulders. He looked at me up and down and said, "He looks about ten years old to me." So, he chose an arbitrary date for the register. That is how my birth date was decided!

"Do you know your ABC?" he asked. I said no. "Okay, we will admit you into 3rd class." So, I was taken to a large room where all the third-grade students sat. There were a few girls in the class, the majority were boys.

The teacher was sitting on a chair behind a large table. "New boy?" I just looked at him. "Go and sit somewhere!" I looked around and there was an empty seat next to another Sikh boy. I sat next to him. His name was Nirwair Singh Bhogal. This boy became one of the richest businessmen in Nakuru and we are still friends! He now owns all the Toyota car businesses in Nakuru, has a car garage business and a crop spraying business. He visits the UK often, where his children now live.



The teacher we had was evidently studying for a law degree. He was not interested in teaching.

When we were all seated, he looked up and said to the boys on his left side, "Each of you stand up and sing a song and continue until everybody has sung". The first boy sang some song from an Indian movie. I had not heard any of the songs. I had never been to a cinema in my life. One boy finished and the next started. Evidently, they had been doing this regularly. I did not know any songs. I knew a lot of "village" songs. Nobody would understand those here and they were not to be recited in front of the teacher!

My turn came, even though I prayed that it wouldn't. I thought the teacher would tell us to do something else soon. This was not what I had to come to learn! Anyhow when my turn came, I stood up and said "Masterji, I do not know any song.

"No song? Stand up on the bench." So, I stood up on the bench while everybody looked at me and giggled! The songs continued unabated. Second round started. I was still standing on the bench. This time I had thought hard and tried to remember a song. A Gujarati man had a gramophone on the ship, and he used to play records from time to time. A few words came to my mind. So, when my turn came, I sang "*Ghata ghan gore gore*,



*more machai shore*". It means "the storm blew hard and the peacocks were making noises". Totally embarrassed, I sat down on the bench. Everybody was laughing. The teacher did not even look up.

So, for the next few weeks I was called "*Ghata ghan gore gore*". Wherever I went at recess time the boys would sing and laugh. I was called "*India Bhai*". This was the name given to any new boy from India. It meant "stupid village boy from India". Obviously, I had no friends. Then a few new boys came to join our class and thankfully, attention was diverted away from me.

I was totally wild. I had long nails and knew a lot of abusive phrases in village Punjabi. I did not know any Swahili. So, I was regarded as the dumb boy from the village.

A boy named Gurbachan Singh one day said some rude words to me and by then I was totally fed up with being the butt of jokes. So, I let him have all the abusive swear words in Punjabi and scratched his arms with my long unkempt nails. His arms were bleeding in some places. The other boys looked on and went very quiet.

The next day Gurbachan came to me during recess time and showed his scratched arms to me and said, "Look at my arms,

if I went to the Headmaster and told him who had done this and all those rude swear words you used on me, you will be taken to his office and punished.” The Headmaster kept a long stick on his desk which he used frequently on bad boys. I felt a bit ashamed of myself and I told him that if he would stop being rude to me, then I will not harm him.

That is how I got my first friend at school. We remained friends even after he left school. There was also another boy I had to wrestle with. I was able to defeat him and he also became my friend.

All the children went to school together which was a walk of about 6km.

Our teacher left or had been sacked after I had been at school for two months. The new teacher that came influenced my life a lot. His name was Mr. Bowery, he was Punjabi. He himself had just passed Senior Cambridge High School Leaving Certificate (Year 10). His father was an engine driver in the railways. Mr. Bowery had no teaching experience, but he was a really good teacher. He took interest in the students' well-being and took extra pains to teach us. Although he was strict, he was actually a kind man. He was also newly married. He took special interest in me. He realised that I was actually very good in Maths and



Urdu, but that I did not know any English. Urdu was the second language after English we all had to take. It was the national language in India, as the British ruled at the time. Urdu was a continuation from Mogul rule in India. It was 1946 and India was still under British rule.

I picked up English very quickly with the help of Mr. Bowery and was soon on par, if not ahead of the class. I was determined to be better and wanted to show the other students that I was clever. I used to read simple English books without ever understanding a word. I also picked up Swahili quite quickly. Mr. Bowery gave me extra tuition at his house. I think we paid him 20 shillings a month. It was worthwhile.

He did not allow us to use biros at school. Even though they were available, they leaked badly and left big blotches on our paper. They also leaked into our shirt pockets and left big blue stains. The tropical heat melted the ink in the biro pens. We had to use proper ink and fountain pens which had a tube in them to draw up the ink.

The school in Nakuru was a big timber family house. There were four classrooms. It went up to Class VII, which was the full primary education. We could smell the curries from the next



house when they were cooking which was very distracting around lunchtime!

We were always hungry and when school finished, we would race home and the first thing we had was some chevra and a cup of cha. All the mothers in the vaera would be busy making cha at the end of the school day! In those days we only had tea leaves. The brand was called 'Brookbonds' but the tea itself was Kenyan, of course. Tea bags came into worldwide use many years later, in the late 70's. The milk was initially in bottles but then later in tetra-paks. We boiled the milk before using it.

The year end (1946) exams came and to everybody's surprise, I topped the class. I was the talk of the town. It was only a small town, and people were surprised that a boy fresh from India could do so well. It gave me a lot of confidence in myself. I remember when I was in Class 3 and had my end of year exam in India, Nanaji said to me "Why are you so worried? Recite the Mool Mantar before taking the exam." I did so and continued to do so for every exam I sat right up to university and afterwards, before I set upon any task in Life.

Beeji gave me a 20c coin for topping the class. I never had that much money to spend on myself ever! I ran to the shops and bought myself a red coloured ice block for 5 cents and still had

15c to spend later. I remember the red colour because the coloured water leaked from the ice block and stained my newly sewn shirt! There were no sticks in ice blocks those days. One had to hold them in a piece of newspaper. I was forgiven! I don't remember what I spent the rest of the money on, probably sugar cane sticks and bananas from the African market. One could buy a bunch of bananas for five cents. One year I was given a whole one shilling for doing well at school. I remember, I gave 30c to the school bully to be on his good side. It worked! He was a big boy in class six and was already shaving!

Pitaji had taught me to be independent. I did shopping for Beeji and could speak to the Gujarati shopkeepers in Hindi, Urdu and Swahili.

We could not stay in the Gurdwara forever. After looking for accommodation for a few months, we found a room behind a shop. There were three large rooms, one was occupied by a Gujarati couple, the next one was ours and on the other side was a small room which was rented out to a single Sikh man who turned out to be very nice. His family was still in India.

The property was owned by a Hindu/Punjabi couple. They sold snacks in the shop and I think they virtually survived on the rent from the rooms. The house was built from corrugated iron

sheets. These iron sheets expanded under the hot sun during the day and emitted crackling noises at night while they contracted due to lower atmospheric temperature.

We had beds under beds like a chest of drawers. We pulled them out at night and pushed them back during the day. The large bed was used for sitting during the daytime.

Pitaji made a small table and chair for me to use while doing my homework. The cooking was done in the veranda in front of the room. There was a common toilet and bathroom with cold running water.

I walked to school; most children did that. We were mostly children of working-class parents. No-one was rich. There was no school uniform as most parents could not afford to buy one. My annual fee was, I think, four shillings.

Things were cheap. We could buy bananas from the market for five cents.

One day Beeji sent me to buy cooking salt, for which she gave me one shilling. I went to the Gujarati shopkeeper and asked for one shilling worth of salt. His eyes popped. He exclaimed, "That much salt !!" He gave me a sack full of salt, which I could not



even carry. I dragged it home. I met the Gurdwara Gyani on the way and he said, "That much salt !!" He helped me to carry it home.

Most of the groceries were bought on account. Most people did that as wages were paid monthly and the groceries account was cleared every month. The grocers were all Gujaratis. As soon as you bought one article, the grocer would enter it in his register and add the amount at the end of the month.

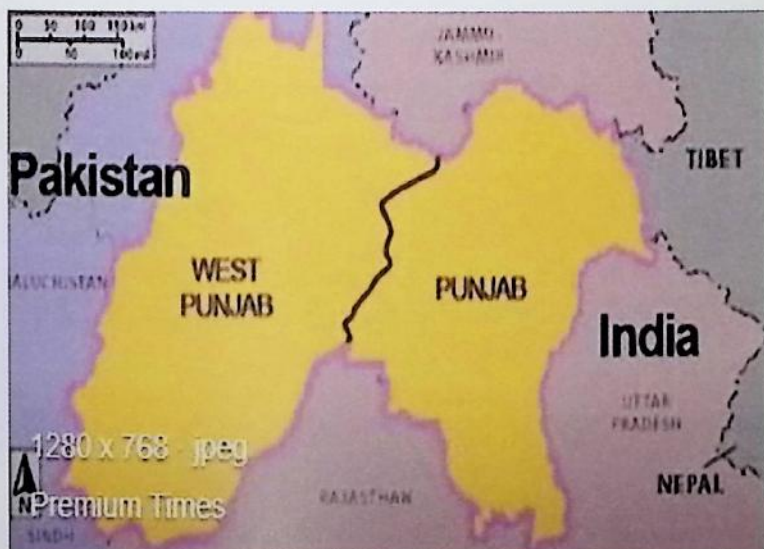
A majority of the customers were working class Sikhs and other Punjabis. They had little education and were often cheated by the grocers. They would add extra items on the account. Pitaji was aware of this, so he asked me to write every purchase we made in an exercise book. I did not know English, so I wrote in Urdu. At the end of the month we would go to the grocer and compare figures before paying the bill. It worked reasonably well, even though they sneaked in unpurchased articles. They would often say to Pitaji, "Your son is very clever" - perhaps to get their payment quickly! To keep customers attached to them, they would also act as a post office and our letters used to come to their address, which we would eventually collect.

Class Four started smoothly. Mr. Bowery remained our teacher. As I topped end of year examinations in Class 3, I was appointed the class monitor in Class 4! It made me feel very proud of

myself because students now looked up to me. Mr. Bowery was also the Scout Master. I joined the Scouts and became Troop Leader.

This was the year 1947. The Independence movement in India had succeeded and it was decided to grant independence to India in August 1947. Lord Mountbatten was sent to India as the last Viceroy and he was to supervise the transfer of power.

The country was divided into Pakistan and India (The 'Partition of India'). Punjab was split into two. The west went to Pakistan and the east part remained with India.



There was a massive movement of people from one side of the border to the other. There was a lot of violence and thousands died.

Fortunately, our relatives were all on the east side and did not suffer. We were worried because we did not get a letter from Nanaji for months. Eventually we got a letter, saying they were all well. There was an enormous economic downturn during this period. It was also not safe for people to travel from one place to another.

There was only one radio in Nakuru at that time. A man who used to run a rent house for single men owned it. In the evening people would go to his place and listen to news on it about India. We could only hear half of what was broadcast as the reception was very poor. Most of the time we just heard crackling noises! Indians in East Africa welcomed the independence of India.

There were peaceful rallies. The Kenyan Government, under the British, raised no objection. Our Scout group also marched in these rallies.

As Kewal was working at the bank, he was able to obtain a radio for a few shillings from a man who was going bankrupt. Pitaji loved it. He was fascinated by the red and green lights on it and



that he could listen to the Indian news. He kept it all the way to the South C house . It was still in very good working condition.

A few years later, a Giani approached him and said that as he was going to India, would he like to donate anything? Pitaji gave him the radio. I wonder if someone somewhere is now listening to it?

As India was now independent, we were offered the opportunity to study Punjabi or Hindi as a second language. I chose to study Hindi. I felt I should know the national language. I could read and write Punjabi at home anyway. I soon learnt to read English. I used to read simple English books which I borrowed from the teacher. There was no school library. We were still not able to talk in English.

Gian Singh joined our class. He came from India and we became good friends. He also joined our Scout troop.

My annual school fee was 4 Kenyan shillings. Pitaji's wages were low. We managed as well as anybody we knew. We didn't feel short of anything. I had two shirts and two pairs of shorts. There was a Sikh tailor who used to sew our clothes. Beeji used to hand sew our shirts. A sewing machine was bought. Later I remember when we went to buy new shorts, Pitaji would tell the

tailor to make the shorts long below the knees because I will grow tall and they would look too short later. We used to accept his decision even though long shorts were not the fashion, like now. The shorts were made from high quality material, so they lasted for years.

There were two cobbler Sikh brothers who used to make our shoes as ready-made shoes were not available. The shoes were roughly made, but highly durable. For a few months all the boys my age had paper tacks hammered into the soles of the shoes so that we could slide over concrete surfaces just for fun. Then a boy spread a rumour that boys who do that will ruin their eyes and have to wear glasses! That stopped everybody!

My Maths and English improved a lot under Mr. Bowery's tutelage. I was also highly motivated. I just wanted to stay top student all the time. If we were still in India, I would probably have given up school after Class 8 or so and like Pitaji would probably have become a carpenter/builder. The teachers in India were cruel.

A new Master came, Mr. Anand, he used to teach Urdu. He and Mr. Bowery for some reason, hated each other. I think Mr. Anand regarded Mr. Bowery as low class. Mr. Anand soon found out that I was Mr. Bowery's favourite student. So, he hated me and tried to put me down whenever possible. He even beat me with

a rope once for some minor misbehaviour. He could not, however, keep me down. I changed to Hindi classes as he was only the Urdu teacher. Mr. Anand had no children of his own and so he hated other children.

The Vice-Principal, Mr. Gopal Das, had started teaching Hindi. He was a very kind teacher and used to live opposite the school. His son and daughter, both married, moved to Wollongong before we came to Australia. (Gopal Das later told me that his son had once asked to see a movie, to which he had replied no. The son was upset and said, "But Mehma Singh has seen that movie!!")

Baburam, our landlord, had a disagreement with Pitaji. One of the tenants living in the next room to us vacated and went back to India.

My cousin, Karnail Singh asked Pitaji if he could rent that room for his family so that they could move to Nakuru from Nairobi. Baburam refused. He must have had plans to rent to someone else.

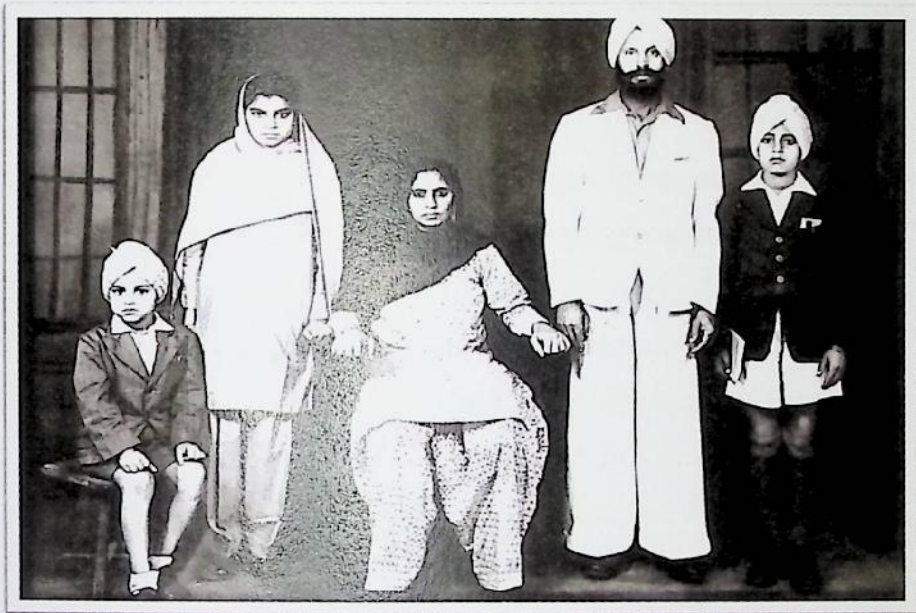
So, we had to leave that house. Baburam actually came to see me when I was an eye specialist. The fee then was 30 shillings, but he could not afford to pay, and in fact never did pay!.



It was still exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to rent rooms elsewhere. This time, Mr. Balwant Singh, who was a building contractor offered us a room at the back of his house. Pitaji used to work for this man. We spent about one year there.

Balwant Singh's wife was a very vain and lazy woman. She used to sleep a lot. If we made any noise that disturbed her sleep, she would complain.

Fortunately for us, a few blocks down the road a Gujarati jeweller family built some rooms at the back of his large block. We were able to rent two rooms from him. We were very happy. Bans and I had our own room. I think Bhainji also slept in this room. We were happy. We also had electric lights. There was no electricity in Baburam's house, and we had to use kerosene lamps at night. Fortunately, there was not much homework for me to do at night and we managed.



**Our Family Photo. Nakuru, 1947.**

**Left to right: Harbans Singh, Harbans Kaur, Beeji, Pitaji  
and me, looking very scholarly.**

I was in Class Five now. It was the year 1948. We were happy in this house. The only problem was that there was only one common tap for water for the whole plot. So, we had to line up for water. There were bucket toilets. The African employees of the council would come at night, empty these buckets into a mule pulled cart, carry it away and dump the night soil in a lower area of the town. There was a flap in the street side of the toilet, through which they pulled the bucket. The street smelled a little, but who cared!

One day, a boy brought the news that a Gujarati shopkeeper was giving two pencils and a rubber eraser for free. All one had to do was to write "RAM", "RAM" in an exercise book which was provided by the shopkeeper. Each page had to be filled like so. This was easy enough for me. I could not write in Gujarati so I asked the shopkeeper if I could write in Urdu, to which he agreed. We learnt that a famous astrologer had come from India and he had told this shopkeeper that he had to fill 200 exercise books with "RAM", "RAM". If he could not do it himself, then he could take help from school children. If he did not complete this task, then a great calamity would strike his family. ("RAM" is the name of Lord Rama in Ramayana. He was considered to be a reincarnation of the God Vishnu in Hindu mythology. He lived in the 3rd age, the Tretayug). I completed this task for him and happily received my 2 pencils and eraser!

Nakuru was a small town. All the Sikh families knew each other, and they were all very friendly. Every Vaisakhi the Gurdwara used to hold Games events where there were athletics races and turban tying competitions. Prizes were given out for the best turban. I did not take part in the turban tying competition as my style had not matured enough yet! There were also competitions in *Gatka*, a Sikh martial arts activity. Instead of swords, participants fight with sticks, training to be future warriors. It has its roots in the time of our Gurus, when the



minority Sikh population were mobilised to fight oppression and injustice against the invading Mughal armies.

I didn't take part in any of these activities because the activities I was good at from the village were things like wrestling, climbing trees, and throwing stones across the pond. There were no competitions for that! There was a man named Sohan Singh who was very muscular. They used to tie him up with a strong rope from which he would then free himself. No one else could do this. He was called "*Rasa thoar*", meaning, rope breaker.

Most of the children were given sweets and little presents at the end of the competitions. Langar followed the Gurdwara program.

I had a friend, Jaswant Singh, whose parents worked at the timber mill a few kilometres away. He wanted me to go home with him one day, so we took a bus, costing 10 cents, to the main road which dropped us near a side road from where his father picked us up on his motorbike. It had a sidecar, which I sat in. He drove us through the narrow roads to the mill. Jaswant's uncle also worked there repairing machinery. They lived on a farm nearby. It was the first time I saw a pit latrine. It was covered with mud and had bricks on either side for one's feet. When you looked down, it was like looking down into a deep well. The smell was overbearing! It was really frightening and there

was the fear of falling into this pit. I have heard stories of children having fallen into this pit and drowning. What an awful death that would be! I never used it and ended up getting constipated!

For dinner, the family prepared chicken. Every single bit of the chicken, minus the beak and toes, was put into boiling water to cook. The feathers were used to stuff pillows. The eyes were removed, and the skin was also cooked. I saw the entire process. After we ate, we were given a small hammer to pound the bones to extract the marrow, which we sucked from the bones. The bones were then given to the dog. Nothing was wasted!

Many years later, I was attending the Smagam held for Baba Isher Singhji in Northolt in the UK, and a man approached me. He said he recognised me; however, I did not know him. He said he knew me as the Head Prefect from school! He turned out to be Jaswant's uncle's son, my friend's cousin! He told me that when his mother was due for his birth, they were racing to the hospital with his mother in this side car of the motorbike. They did not reach the hospital in time and he was actually born in the side car!

My youngest brother, Amrik was born in November 1948. I did not even know that Beeji was expecting! Both Bans and I were greatly surprised when we came home and found that we had a younger brother! Beeji had sent us to Mr. Bowery's house earlier that day.



## Transport Business

There was an empty room next to us which was soon rented by a man called Thakar Singh. His family was still in India. Thakar Singh convinced Pitaji to go into partnership with him and buy a truck, to start a transport business. Beeji had her doubts but was overruled by Pitaji. So, we had a large truck. The plan was to transport concrete from the stone quarries to building sites. A lot of building work had started in Kenya as the war had ended. More and more people had started bringing their families from India.

The plan was for Pitaji to keep doing his present job as a carpenter/builder and Thakar Singh would manage the transport business. We split the expenses and the shared profits.

Thakar Singh was not a hard-working man. He had no experience of business and was totally un-educated. He also could not drive! So, we employed an African driver and one other African employee to help with loading the truck. It was not hard to get work. A few other people had been doing this for a while. The truck was bought on the advice of one of those people.

Thakar Singh would spend his time standing around the town centre and let the driver take the truck. The driver, unfortunately,

had an alcohol problem. We had to pay his fine once because he was arrested for drink driving. We were told this by the other people in the business that the driver had started teaching other Africans to drive the truck on the side. Thakar Singh's reaction was "They're jealous!" when we confronted him. So, he did not bother to go with the driver, nor sack him. This all lasted a few months until it was realised that we were falling into debt. So, this business was stopped, and the truck was sold at a loss! Not a good experience. Nevertheless, Pitaji was extremely hard working by nature, and somehow the debt was cleared.

## The Plot

In early 1949, two big "plot" houses were constructed by two Sikhs outside the city. This came as a great relief to the Sikh families because they could easily rent rooms in these plots. The house was built on a large block of land. Each house had about 10 rooms. There was a row of kitchens at one boundary of the house, and there were two toilets for each block.

We rented one room in the plot owned by Bhagat Singh. The other plot was owned by Isher Singh. These two were friends. Bhagat Singh was educated. He always dressed smartly and always wore a tie, he also had a car. He was the manager of one of the sawmills in a town called Molo, which was on the edge of the forest. The wood was cut from the forest and brought to this mill for sawing into smaller pieces. Bhagat Singh had his own house in this mill. He was married and had two sons and a daughter. The family lived in one of the large rooms in the plot in Nakuru. One of his sons, Jagdish, was in my class. The other, Kirpal Singh, was older. He was in a school in Nairobi.

Bhagat Singh usually came to Nakuru at least once a month. Everybody used to call him "Babuji", which is a title given to an educated man. Bhagat Singh was very quiet. He hardly spoke



to anybody, while the rest of the family was very friendly. Bhagat Singh's wife was one of Beeji's friends.

Our rent was initially 50 Kenyan shillings a month which was eventually increased to 80 Kenyan shillings per month. Our rent was the lowest and we were not to reveal this to the other tenants. I think our rent was low because Beeji talked to the landlady nicely and secondly, she wanted to help because Beeji had a good son who was a bright student. Thus, they thought we deserved respect and help. Their son who was in my class at school had epilepsy. He used to get fits intermittently. I don't think he was under any medical treatment. The disease was considered an act of nature.

It was discovered much later that Bhagat Singh led a double life unbeknown to everybody - he had an African wife. He kept her in a house outside Molo. He also had children from this lady.

His son Kirpal went a bit wild in Nairobi. He had money to spend, given to him by his father, but had no supervision. He probably got into bad company. He was jailed in Nakuru for molesting an African girl. He was later sent to the UK and married a girl from India. Kirpal kept his criminal activities up in London. At one time he pretended to be the son of an Arab Sheikh and gambled at the Playboy Club in London. He then went into debt and the

club thought this Arab Prince's father would clear the debt, but when he was contacted, he obviously had no knowledge of Kirpal. So, Kirpal was jailed again. He later migrated to Canada with his family.

The plot housed several Sikh families, all had one room each to them. We had three large beds placed around the room and there were two other beds pushed under the big bed like a chest of drawers. We pulled this out at night. The beds were used as sofas during the daytime.

Pitaji had bought a bicycle by now and we kept it inside at night. The cooking was done in the verandah. Eventually we were given a kitchen. The cooking was done on charcoal braziers (*jikos*). At mealtimes, there would be a row of braziers in the plot. All the ladies cooked and gossiped with each other and food was at times shared. If one family had guests, all the others banded together and helped the family. So, the burden of extra cooking was shared.

It was a very friendly atmosphere. The children would play hockey or other games in the front yard. It was quite a large area. My friend Gian and his family also moved into one of the rooms. We had one small table for me to study.

The lights had to be off at 9pm in all rooms by the order of the Landlady. She exempted us from that limit. She said, "Their son has to study." There appears to have been God's hand in my life. Nakuru was a small town. Everybody knew of me. The family was known as "Mehma's family"; Beeji was known as "Mehma's mother", and Pitaji as "Mehma's father". Very few people knew their real names if at all.

The plot was big! There was a large water tank about six feet tall and six feet wide in the centre of the courtyard which was all concreted. There was always a shortage of water in Nakuru. This tank carried us all through the year. The tank was mainly filled with rainwater collected from the roofs.

There were bathrooms which we had to share and two toilets at the outer boundary of the plot. There were bucket latrines with a metal flap at the back facing the back lane. The night soil was collected by African council employees. They could come at any time of the day or night and we had to make sure that no one was using the toilet when the employees came to empty the "fully loaded" buckets. We were told a story that a Gujarati lady did not move off the toilet in time and the African had cut her buttocks with a "*panga*" machete. True or not, we were certainly frightened.



It was quite an exercise to use the latrines in the morning. Everybody was in a rush to go to work or school. We had to line up with our empty jam cans full of water to use the facility. If you placed your can in line and went away even for a short while, the place in the queue was respected. There was minimal privacy. Everybody knew who was constipated and who had diarrhoea. One person had bleeding piles and we all knew about that! There were taps nearby to wash our hands. The hygiene level was not bad.

Most of the boys in my class went to the Gurdwara which was near the school, every morning for "*matha-take*". Sometimes we had prashad in the morning. We all had bicycles by now. We often went on picnics. It was safe to go into the bush those days. We used to cycle to the nearby farm to buy goods. Nakuru has volcanic soil and a lot of fresh "*saag*" (mustard leaf) grew there, which everybody bought. Other friends my age would also do the same for their families.

There was a great spirit of community among the residents. We helped each other in times of difficulty. Sister Banso got married in April 1953. Everybody in the plot helped. The wedding party was held in the plot. People made their own decorations. One person brought a line of electric lights and hung them in the plot. Guests were housed with different people in the plots because

we each had one room only. People shared happily, even though it was inconvenient.

Year 6 in school passed peacefully. Year 6 always gave Year 7 a party. I gave an impressive speech. I was used to giving speeches in the Gurdwara. Every *Gurpurbh*, there was a children's program during which we had to relate a *sakhi* or read a poem. I became Prefect, then Head Prefect.

**End of Year 6, after a party where I gave a speech.**



**Joint photo with Year 7.**

**I am sitting 3rd from left, front row, next to Mr Bowery.**

**Kewal Singh is in the back row, 4th from the left.**

Year 7 (1950) was the final year of school and was also the end of Primary School education. We had to sit the Kenya



Preliminary Examination at the end of Year 7. The exam papers were set by the Ministry of Education in Nairobi and were also marked by their examiners. We were all anxious, both pupils and teachers, as the examination results were a measure of the school's academic competence. Our school did well and was in fact had the best result in the Rift Valley area. I did well in the exam and the teachers were very happy.

School end (1950) was a worrying time for me and the family. There was no High School in Nakuru. Students who wanted to study further had to go to Nairobi and had to stay there. Most students who went to Nairobi to study did not finish or did not pass Year 10. They either got into bad company or just could not cope living away from home. I was very sad. I could give up studies and start looking for some job. This was unthinkable even to the parents.

So, it was decided that I would go to Nairobi and stay in a boarding house for up-country students. This place was called "*The Ashram*". No one who stayed there passed Year 10, or they left earlier. There were fights and bullying by older boys. It was run by some charitable organisation and the fees were reasonable. The other choice was to stay with Karnail Singh's family and walk to school from there. We did not wish to burden him as he had six children of his own to look after. They were living in one large room as most families did in those days.



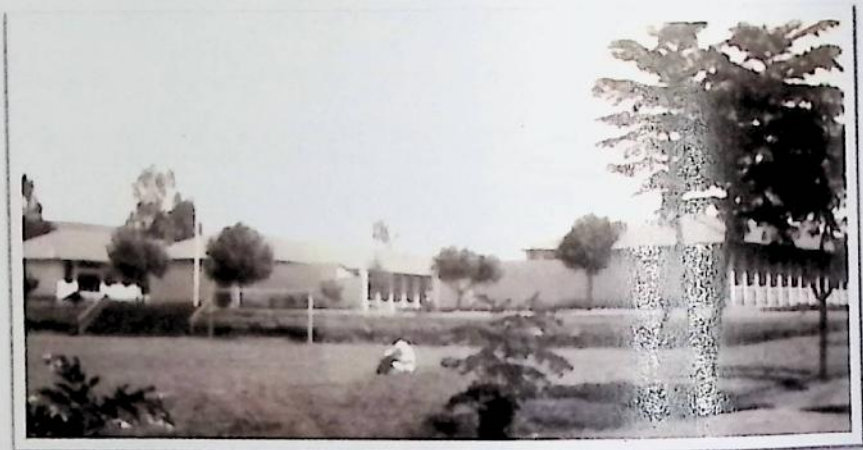
## High School

The year we moved into the plot was also the year when we moved into a brand newly built school, later known as Menengai High School.



The government realised that the number of pupils at the old school would not fit there anymore, so a new school was built. We also had a separate Science Lab. Still no Library. There was a big hall for functions, school plays et cetera

For the first time we had a football and a separate hockey ground. Mr. M.L. Sood was the Headmaster. He believed in physical fitness. "*Healthy Mind in a Healthy Body*" was a saying he used frequently.



**Sitting on the soccer field at Menengai High School**

Luckily for me just about one month before the new high school term was about to start, The Rift Valley Education Department decided to upgrade our school to High school! The school was to start in Form 1 (1st year high school) and continue till Form IV, the final year of high school. It was to be a fully-fledged high school.

The name was changed to Menengai High School instead of Nakuru Indian school. The name Menengai was chosen as there was a big geological prehistoric crater nearby, which was called Menengai crater. This was probably created by a meteor long ago. Some people believed that the crater was an extinct volcano. We used to go there on scouting excursions.

I was appointed the first  
Head Prefect and  
continued to be in this position  
till the end of Form IV.  
I was also the Scout Troop  
Leader.



The other good news for me was that I had won Dr Shah's scholarship for being the best student at Menengai. I received 420 Kenyan shillings every year till I finished High school. This took the burden off Pitaji for my education and was more than enough to pay for my school fees, books etc. This money was given as a lump sum at the start of the school year. I persuaded Pitaji to buy me a new bicycle which cost about 200 shillings in those days. The rest of the money was used for my sister's wedding.

From then on, my parents did not have to spend anything on my education. I was so happy and relieved. The schoolbooks and exercise books were supplied free by the Kenyan Government.



School life was quite enjoyable for me. Teachers respected me and I had a lot of friends. The school was only for Indians. Europeans and Africans had separate schools. Non-Europeans or non-whites were not allowed to go to the European schools or join European clubs or use their libraries. It was a strictly segregated society. Kenya was a British colony. The laws were made by the colonial whites.

Public toilets were also segregated. We could not go to the big hotels unless you were working there in some menial job. I was firmly rebuked by a European when I once entered a toilet marked "Gentlemen only". This was the Ministry of Education building and "Gentlemen only" meant "Europeans only". I was diverted to the Indian toilets. There were also separate toilets for the Africans. We mostly went to the Indian shops for any shopping. Nobody bothered you much as long as you kept to your side of town.

All our teachers were Indian, mostly with university degrees from India. Our school was co-educational, but we were not allowed to talk to the girls. I, being the Head Prefect, could, however, talk to the girls, but only if necessary. We used to have school plays at the end of year term. They were great fun. I found I was a good actor. I took part in all school debates and my team was usually victorious. We had three girls in our class. They mostly

kept to themselves. The sex education we got was from other boys or older boys in the community. It was mostly rubbish!

A new teacher came from Nairobi named Mohan Singh. He was very keen on Scouting; he had received high merits in the Scouts movement. He became our Scout Master even though he taught Primary school classes. Our troops became quite active. We even had our own school band. I used to play the bagpipes. We often went camping and stayed out nights. We had to carry very heavy tents on our shoulders.

Kenya was a safe country. The only danger was wildlife, but we kept away from the game parks. Once a lion walked into the Nairobi city area. It came from the Nairobi national park which was nearby. The game wardens were able to turn it back into the forest and no one was hurt.

The grasslands around Nairobi were full of wild game, especially the Nakuru lake area. The lake was a haven for flamingos. There were hundreds of them in the lake. We often went to the lake on bicycles.

Master Mohan Singh and Santokh Singh, another Scout master, took about twenty of us on tour to Tanzania.

We travelled 185 km by train to Kisumu, a port town on Lake Victoria. Lake Victoria is the largest, sweet water lake in the world and the source of the Nile river.



The teacher is standing in front and I am on the right in the window.



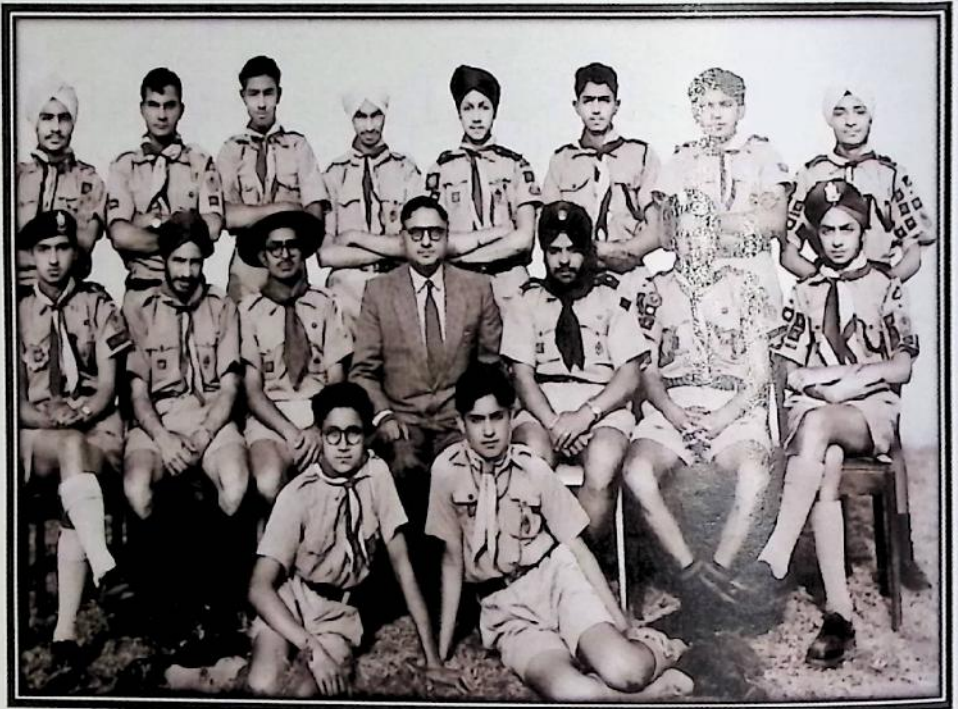
We caught a steam ship from Kisumu and went west across the lake and landed at a place called Musoma in Tanzania.

We then took the train to Dodoma and then to Dar-es-Salaam. The engine drivers were mostly Sikhs. They helped us a lot on the way. In Dar-es-Salaam we stayed at a boarding school. The Sikh community kept us fed.

We then caught the train back to Nairobi.

It was a great trip. Other students with us were my friends Kewal, Teja, Akum, Bhagat and Pritam. They were my classmates also. This was a round trip of over 2000km.

## Scout Group



I am seated 2nd from right, middle row.

Kewal Singh standing, at end on right, back row.

The Principal is in the middle and to his right in the hat is  
Mr. Bowery.

To his left is the Scout Master, Mohan Singh.

To my left is Tarlochan Singh, he became a police officer and now lives  
in Hounslow, UK.

Behind Bowery is Riaz, one of my good friends, he is also in the UK.

Behind the Principal, to his right, is Gunga Singh, a psychiatrist, now  
retired, living in Manchester.

## Sister's Wedding Day

In April 1953, Bhainji, Harbans Kaur, we call her "Banso", got married. She was only 18 years old then. I really admired her as she had never been away from the family even for a day. She put on a very brave face. She was never sent to school and she learnt Punjabi and the English alphabet at home. Beeji taught her all the household matters.

She was married to Santokh Singh, who was the son of Naranjan Singh. Narajan Singh and Karnail Singh had a furniture making workshop in Nairobi. Karnail Singh had suggested Santokh Singh as a suitable match for Bhainji.

The wedding ceremony was conducted in the plot where we lived. The wedding party stayed at the Gurdwara. They spent the night in Nakuru.

Pitaji had hired a sweet maker who had a sweet shop in Nakuru to make the mithai for the wedding guests.

My uncle, Pitaji's cousin and his wife came from Tanga, Tanzania, for the wedding. All the families in the plot helped to organise the wedding and gave presents.



**Bhainji's  
Wedding Day.**



Front row from right:  
The three sons of Mr. Kalay; Jassi, Jaggi and Sona.  
Then Bans, and Jeeta.  
Infront of Jeeta is Meekay, with his hair open.

Wedding day in our Nakuru house, the one room we all shared.



Bhainji is sitting on the bed.

Note the smaller bed tucked underneath the larger bed.

On the wall above the window to the right is our family photo.

The window looks out onto the *vaera*, the common outdoor area of the plot.

Bhainji's eldest daughter, Bhinder, was born in our plot in Nakuru. We kept them with us in Nakuru for about two months, and they then went to Nairobi.

When Bhinder was at school going age, she came back to live with us in Nakuru and went to school there. She stayed with us till she finished Class VII. Santokh Singh worked as a fitter technician in the railway workshops in Nairobi. For a few years,

they stayed with the in-law's joint family. They separated from the family after their second daughter was born.



**Bhinder, seated at the left, in front of Beeji,  
with other ladies of the plot.  
The lady 2<sup>nd</sup> from left was called Jindo.**

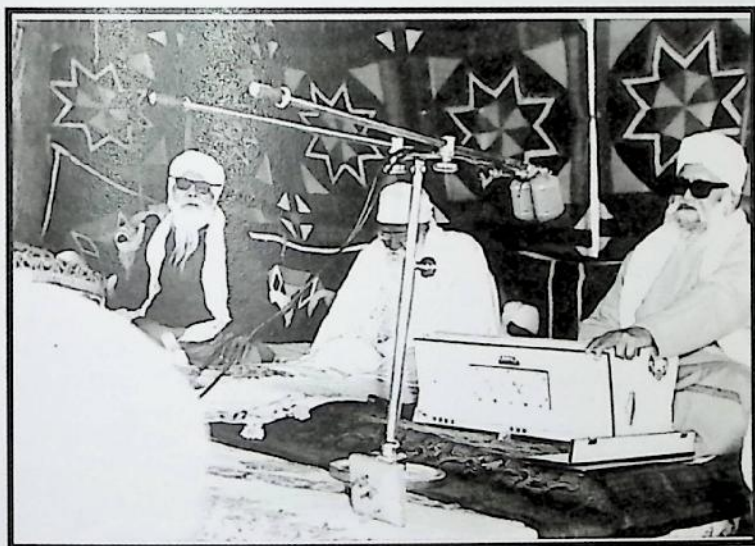


## Spiritual Visitors

In 1952, His Blessed Rarewale Sant, Baba Isher Singhji, came to Nairobi with his Jatha. They spent some months there, then at the request of the Sangat, they also came to Nakuru.

Sant Baba  
Isher  
Singhji on  
the right.

Sant Baba  
Kishan  
Singhji on  
the left



Narinder Singh Kalay, who was a court clerk in Nakuru and was also the secretary in the Gurdwara, had already known Sant Ji in India. His family were sewaks of Babaji. Their village, Batahri, was near Rara Sahib, where Babaji had his residence. ("Sthan"). Babaji's birth village was Allowal.

Babaji was a true Saint. They were highly spiritual. They had been meditating under the guidance of Sant Atar Singhji of Reru Sahib since the age of 16, having left school in Year 10.

Babaji and their Jatha stayed in Nakuru for a little over three months. There was Kirtan and Katha in the Gurdwara every day. We attended all the Kirtans. Most of the Sikhs in Nakuru used to attend their sessions.

Babaji and their Jatha lived in the plot where we lived. Narinder Singh Kalay had a large corner room which he vacated for Babaji's stay. Plot ladies, including Beeji, of course, helped in the Sewa of preparing the Langar every day. In addition to Gurdwara Kirtan, Babaji used to hold a "KURSI" session at their place of residence over the weekends. People from Nairobi used to drive up to attend these sessions.

#### **Babaji's KURSI session.**



Babaji would sit on a chair and we all sat on the floor. This was a question/answer session. People asked questions of various spiritual matters. No other discussion other than spiritual matters was allowed. I learnt a lot in these sessions.



Meekay became Santji's favourite child in the plot. He once sat on Babaji's bed and talked to Babaji. He was about four years old at the time. Beeji used to comb his hair and leave it open; as a result, Babaji used to call him "*Msungu*" which meant "European".

Beeji did a lot of Sewa. One evening we made a special Langar for Babaji and their Jatha. After the Langar, Babaji called Beeji and Pitaji for a private meeting. I don't know all that was discussed. Beeji did tell me though that she had told Babaji that our financial situation was not great, to which Babaji had replied, *"When in your family you have your own business as distinct from a job, there will be no shortage of money"*. They also advised them on spiritual matters.

I wanted to talk to Babaji privately about Naam. Beeji requested a time slot. Babaji's main sewak, Rala Singh, said that Babaji had said to Beeji and Pitaji that *"Your son is going to be highly educated."* It seems that I was not yet ready for Naam.

Babaji gave Beeji his old *Chola* with his blessings and a neck scarf. We still have this *Chola* at home.



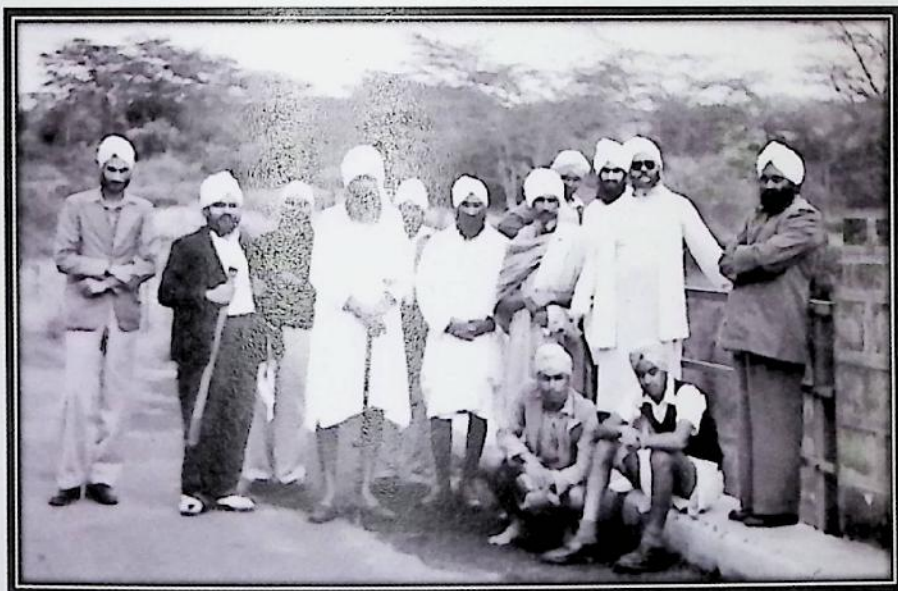
Together with about 50 people, young and old, I took Amrit from Babaji's Jatha. Babaji suggested a name change as is the custom after Amrit. My name came up as Darshan Singh. I did not change my name; Nanaji had given me my name and we wished to keep it as is. I learnt to do Japji Sahib, Rehras and Kirtan Sohila which I mostly continued reciting throughout life, although I may have slackened a bit after becoming a doctor, as I became extremely busy and was working all hours.

Babaji returned to Waheguru's heavenly abode on 26th August 1975, in Wolverhampton, UK. Since then, a Barsi has been held in their memory to this day. It is a three-day Smagam held on large grounds in Northolt, UK. I have attended these programs where many famous "Gianis" take part with Kirtan and Katha. Also attending is the current Head of Rara Sahib, Baba Baljinder Singh. I have spoken with them.

I also, with Waheguru's grace, met Baba Teja Singhji, the third in line after Babaji Isher Singhji, whilst in India. I asked him for his Blessing, and he patted me on the back, and gave me a *Mala* which I still have to this day. He also blessed Dev with one and she was given one for each of my four children. The second time I met him on another trip to India, he gave me a smaller mala, known as a *Simirana* and advised me on Simran.

**Sant Baba Ji Isher Singhji and his Jatha.**

**Santji is second from right, standing.  
That's me sitting on the right.**



## Sports Competition

There were two other Indian high schools in the Rift Valley area. One in Eldoret and the other in Kisumu. We used to have sister school sports competitions.

When I was in Form 3, the competition was held in Nakuru. I was selected to play in the hockey, football, and volleyball teams. Our school won most of the games.

**Football Team**  
I am 3rd from the left, back row.





I was asked by the school principal, Mr. Sood, to make a speech at the conclusion of the games. I was a bit nervous, but it went alright.

**Hockey Team.**  
**I am seated, middle row, on the left.**



The school play in 1953 was a great success. We raised nearly 5000Sh for the school. I took part in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi plays, playing various roles.

Our Punjabi play was about quack doctors. It was really funny. People still talk about it, even now. It was made up by us students, not written by anybody. We acted out a scene where Kewal was applying for a position as a doctor's assistant. He

was asked if he knew any English and was tested on it. I was the doctor interviewing him, and to test him, I wrote "WATER" on the blackboard and asked him, "What's this?". He thought for a while and said "Sand"! Everybody was laughing. We had markings on the board for each dead patient because of our fumbling!

Unfortunately, Pitaji was always working so he never made it to the plays. People would meet him in the street and say, "Didn't you see your son in the play?".

When I returned to visit the school in 1956 after I started University, the Menengai students asked me to train them for another school play.

The 1953 end of year school sports competition was won by my house, the Athenian house. I was the House Captain.

Prizes were presented to us by Lady Mountbatten who happened to be visiting Nakuru at that time.

I went to receive several prizes. In a typical British way, she said, "You have done very well this year!" I still remember her voice. Lord Mountbatten was the last Viceroy of India before Independence.





**Meeting Lady Mountbatten, 1953.**

**Winners of the Inter-School competition!  
I am seated front row, second to the left of the Principal.**





The final school year, Form IV (1954) started in earnest. We had to sit Cambridge High School Certificate examinations at the end of the year. The result decided whether one would be able to go to University or have to find a job.

I also became a Queen's Scout that year. I passed all the tasks well that were set by the area scout body. Kewal Singh also became a Queen's Scout with me. The badges were presented to me by the Area Commissioner. It was the highest award for Scouting.

## **“How do we Get this Stone?”**

We were mostly a healthy family, thank God for that. Pitaji never took a sickie ever. He often worked seven days a week.

There was a holiday or “Gurpurab” day when we all went to the Gurdwara. Beeji had been suffering from piles for years, I learnt later. All treatments were tried. One of the old ladies advised us that she knew of a sure treatment for piles, which always worked. She said that when Muslims go to Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), they use stones to hit Satan and drive him away from this world. If we could get one of these stones, it would help. She said that one had to rub the piles gently with the stones and the piles disappear!

After a long discussion by the ladies of the plot, it was decided to approach a Muslim lady who had been to Mecca. One of the ladies knew such a Muslim lady. So, one day she accompanied Beeji to this woman's house. Everybody knew everybody in Nakuru. She welcomed them and offered tea as was the custom and asked for the purpose of the visit. The Masi who was with Beeji explained to the Muslim lady that Mehma's mother (as that was how Beeji was known as), has piles and we have been told that you have a stone from Mecca. If you could lend it to us so that Beeji can touch the piles with this stone and cure them! The

Muslim lady turned red in the face and was furious! "These stones are "*Paak*", or, Holy. and you want to touch a dirty area with it! Get out of my house! I will not repeat this to other Muslims in this town or there will be war!"

That was that. We eventually took Beeji to see an English doctor in Nakuru, who charged 90Sh and gave her injections. Beeji was quite weak around this time due to the bleeding from the piles. While I was at school, I used to make excuses like having forgotten a book or something, just so I could come back home to see if she was alright.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **End of High School and Struggle for Further Education**

Our teachers were all Indian. They were highly devoted to their jobs. The school principal was also good. The teachers made us work hard. There were less than 30 students in form IV. There were three girls in our class. It was a year of stress and anticipation for both the students and teachers. This was the first Senior Cambridge School Certificate Exam for our school. Teachers and the principals' reputation depended on the results achieved by us. I studied Science subjects. I wanted to be a doctor. How was I going to do it? I had no idea. The dream was there. I oversaw our school First Aid team. I treated minor injuries at school. St John's Ambulance Society held annual exams for First Aid, which I used to sit and pass.

Eventually the final exam came. The exam papers were set by Cambridge University. I think Cambridge university was appointed by the British government to conduct the exam for all British colonies including Malaysia, Burma, etc. This made the standards even higher. In any case all the East African schools had to do this exam at the end of the fourth high school year. The exam papers were marked in the UK and results sent to the individual schools in the colonies. I felt I had done well. The

results came at the end of November in 1954. I was awarded First Grade and topped the class. Another student, Subhash Gupta, also got a First Grade.



**My friends and I at the end of High School.**  
**I am on the left, then Dalbir, Kewal, Dyal and Teja.**

Now the worry had started. I was the top student but had no money to study further. My other classmates who had not done as well as me were planning to go to the UK or India for further education. There was no University in Kenya. I felt quite sad but could not do anything.

My teacher advised that I may apply for Primary School Teachers Training in Nairobi and may be able to get a government grant. I really did not want to do that. I wanted to be a doctor! Pipedream! Inside, I fell. I may be forced to take a job in local banks or the post office or even the railways as a clerk. Quite a few students who did not pass the School Certificate did such jobs. My friend Kewal Singh joined Barclays Bank as a clerk. Kewal's father had died that year in an industrial accident. I somehow had faith in Guruji that something will happen to help me in my further studies. Those, whose parents could afford it, started organising their overseas trips.

We spent the holidays playing cards. It was very entertaining and enjoyable!





My schoolteachers were greatly empathetic. It seems they felt my pain. The Sikh teachers, even though they were not teaching me any subjects at this stage, got together and asked for a meeting with the Gurdwara Committees. A meeting was arranged one evening. I did not attend the meeting. After a prolonged discussion it was agreed that the Gurdwara would sponsor my education overseas and give me 600 Kenya Shillings every month! I was very happy but also a bit apprehensive about taking money from the community. This was January 1955. Pitaji's wages were about 400-450 KSh a month. No way could he contribute anything to my further education. We could manage our family expenditure reasonably well with that because our needs were minimal. I was considering making arrangements to go to the UK for further education. I was a little apprehensive about the Gurdwara monies - suppose they stopped sending me money, what would I do in a strange country?

The school principal called me one day and said there was some good news. Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, had sent letters around to Indian schools that they would be accepting Indians for the first time to study there. They, however, would not take anybody who had not achieved a first grade in the SCSC. I was the right candidate! So, I applied to Makerere College University. The other student who also had a first grade

was Subhash Gupta from my class. He also applied for admission. We both applied for Science subjects so that we could do Medicine afterwards. The reply came soon, and we were both accepted. I was really elated. Waheguru had solved a major problem for me and the family.

Makerere University was established by the British Government in Uganda with the aim of educating Africans, who eventually would be the future leaders in their countries. London University in the UK, which had been established for more than fifty years, was requested to start this university. To keep the standards high, the examination papers were set in the UK. London University sent experts to Uganda to conduct the examination every year. So, the University had already established a good reputation for being the top University in Africa. A lot of original research was done on tropical disease. There were other faculties, apart from Medicine - Agriculture, Arts, Sciences, Teacher training etc. The University was purely residential i.e. there were specific halls built for the students to live there and study. There was a separate building for female students.

I could have applied for a full scholarship. The Gurdwara committee had agreed to pay for my education so I felt my chances of getting University admission would be greater if I showed I had means and pay for my education. This was a big mistake, as I realised later. I was accepted to study the London



Intermediate Exams in Science which was equivalent to the HSC or A levels in the UK. It was a two-year course. If I passed the exams, I would be considered for admission to the Medical School.

The students attending the University travelled to Kampala by train. The three East African countries, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya had arranged with the East African railways to pick up the students from various stations and take them to Kampala. There were special trains for University students.

The train fare was paid for by the governments. We had to take our own food etc. I took "*prontae*" which Beeji had packed for me.

Our train started from the coast, (Mombasa) and went north towards Kampala, picking up students on the way. Students from Tanzania also travelled part of the distance in a steam ship across Lake Victoria to reach Uganda. Students from Zambia, Malawi etc came by air. Governments paid for all of us. We had no students from West Africa. There had been only one other Indian boy who had attended the University before me. Apart from myself, there was Subhash and two other Gujaratis who had come from Zanzibar. I was the first Sikh to attend Makerere University.



Finally, the day came when we had to leave Nakuru, I packed three shirts, two pairs of shorts, one pair of trousers, three pairs of socks, two turbans, one fountain pen, a bottle of ink and a few pencils. I had only one pair of shoes which had been worn for quite a while. I also bought a wristwatch for 30Sh (£1.10) which lasted seven years in University - and beyond! Beeji had packed prontos for me. The Gurdwara had given me the first term fees. This was about 1000Sh.

I think Bans dropped me to the station on his bicycle. I had all my belongings in a suitcase which also had a light blanket and two bed sheets, a pillow, and one towel. I did not want the family to see me off at the railway station. I knew Beeji would cry. Pitaji was at work anyway. The station master told me which cabin I had to be in. There were four students to each cubicle.

When I was about to board the train a few Sikhs from the community came and started putting money in my pocket. A couple of them gave 100Sh each which was a lot of money in those days.

This support from the community brought tears to my eyes. I did not expect all this. Waheguru has helped me in so many ways! Narinder Singh Kalay, our neighbour, and the Gurdwara secretary must have organised this. He was very helpful to the family. He always encouraged me. His wife was one of Beeji's

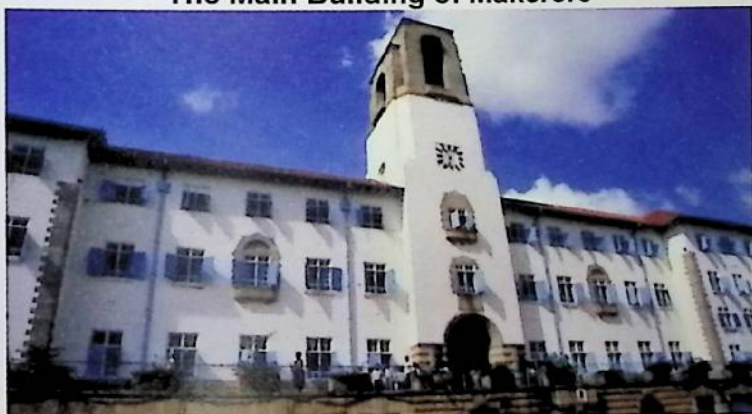
close friends. They had three boys and one girl. We used to play hockey in the plot with them. They were all younger than me. Subhash's family came to see him off. They were all crying. This was the first time we were going away from home. Later, I learnt that Beeji cried a lot after I had left.

# University in Kampala

1955 – 1956

The train arrived in Kampala the next day. We had to spend a night on the train, so we slept in our seats. There were buses at the railway station to collect us and take us to the University residential halls. There were four residential halls, and there was one smaller hall was for female students. Each hall was a double storey building with separate rooms, common toilets and showers. Each hall housed about 50 students.

**The Main Building of Makerere**



I was assigned to Northcote Hall, a very long building, and Subhash to New Hall. These halls were next to each other with open grounds between the two halls. There was an attached area with separate dining halls for each hall. Our Hall warden was an Englishman. He was strict but fair.



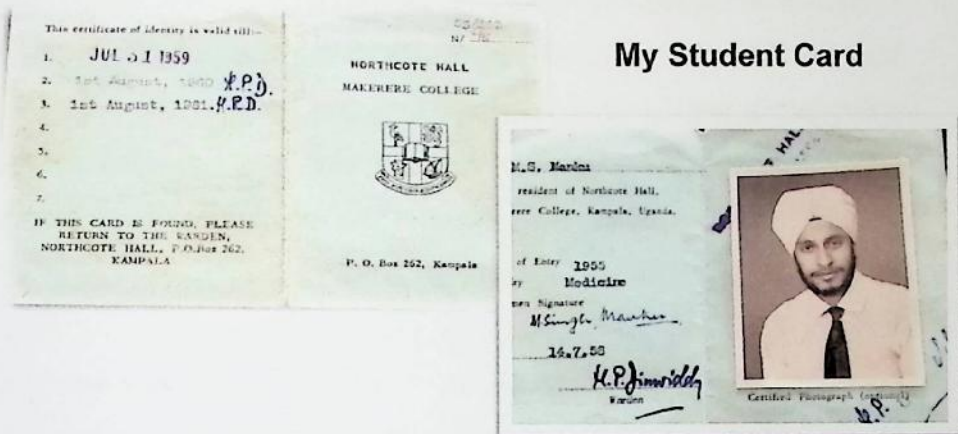
Northcote Hall



📷 *Makerere University Northcote Hall. October 30,*

We were provided with four meals a day - breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner. At dinner time we had to wear special gowns.

The warden and some lecturers sat at the high table. The rest of us sat on benches around long tables where the food was placed. Meals were cooked in a large kitchen. They were bland, suited to African taste. There were no curries! Still, the food was good and wholesome.



Lectures started in earnest. I coped well with Biology and Chemistry. Physics was difficult. We had only studied General Science at school. There wasn't much Physics in that. Some African schools taught this as a separate subject and those students were therefore good at it.

At school we were given the impression that Africans were not very intelligent. This was the colonial way of thinking. I soon realised that the colour of skin is no sign of intelligence. Some of the African students were quite clever. For the first time, I felt that I was not the best student. At our school, I had always topped all my classes and stood first in the class year even in the Senior Cambridge Certificate Examination.

While I was struggling with Physics, I received news from home that the Gurdwara Committee had had another meeting. There were two groups. One was against the idea of financing my education, and Pitaji heard about this. He borrowed some money and returned the money that the Gurdwara had given me. He said, "Don't fight because of my son."

I was shocked and disappointed. It seemed I was not destined to study Medicine after all. I went to talk to our Hall warden. He was an Englishman. I explained the situation to him. He advised me to write to the Kenya Education Department and explain the situation. I wrote a long letter to the Head in Nairobi. This letter was passed to the Rift Valley office of Education in Nakuru. They contacted my old school headmaster and asked him to ask Pitaji to go to them for an interview. So, on an arranged date Pitaji went to the Education Department Office in Nakuru. One of the schoolteachers accompanied Pitaji to translate as he did not speak English. The Senior Education officer, an Englishman, asked Pitaji detailed questions about his income and expenditures. I had already written all that in my initial letter to them.

To cut it short, it was decided that I would be given a Kenyan Government Bursary which would cover my tuition fees and provide for books and even some pocket money. I received a



letter from the Kenyan Government to this effect. I thanked Waheguru for his Blessing. At the back of my mind, I knew the Gurdwara offer somehow was not going to be successful. Narinder Singh Kalay, our neighbour, who was a court clerk and secretary of the Gurdwara committee, had also written a letter to the Education Department explaining what had happened and made a plea for my financial support.

I think there is Guru Nanak's hand in everything. I got more money than I could spend because all the expenses were now paid by the Kenyan government. I was able to save some money and place it into a savings account in the bank. Train travel tickets during and after holidays were also covered by the Kenyan Government, so my parents did not have to spend a cent on my education for the next seven years. University in those days consisted of the final two years of high school and five years of University for the Medical degree, hence seven years.

Studying was quite hard. I had to compete with the best brains in East Africa, Zambia, Malawi, etc. Physics remained my weak subject. I got good marks, but not as high as in other subjects. Makerere was an academic University - there was not much social life. There were annual balls. I did not attend those. I was quite happy that my financial worries were over.

We used to get nearly three months of holidays at the end of the academic year. When every term ended, we had special trains to take us home and bring us back. At the end of the first year, I came home and started looking for a job. I got a job as a clerk in the local East African Railway's office. They knew I was a University student.

I was to work in the Accounts Section. The head clerk was a Muslim man. He was very nice to me. Most of the staff were Muslim. I was given the task of balancing the ledgers and filing. The work was at least three months behind schedule, according to the head clerk. I finished all that in about two weeks.

One of the staff members then called me outside. "Do you think that we can't do that work which you have done??" I looked at him blankly. "You have destroyed our overtime and we will be paid less!" I was shocked. I did not know that they were intentionally delaying balancing the ledgers. I somehow said "sorry". Some of the clerks would arrive in the morning, put their jackets on the chair then they normally sat or went out to smoke, or just stood around in the toilet area! This was their daily routine when I was there. The head clerk would get angry, but nothing changed while I was there for three months!

Second year at University went smoothly and we had the final examinations for the London Intermediate Certificate.

Again, I was worried about the Physics practical exam. The rest was okay. The results of the exams went to various faculties for assessment for admission to whichever course we applied for.

I had, of course, applied for Medicine.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Medical Student**

I was called for an interview by the Medical Admissions Committee. The Committee consisted of a Professor of Medicine and a Professor of Public Health. There were two other people who did not ask any questions. I was asked a few questions which I don't remember now. Just before I left, the Professor of Medicine asked me, "Why do you want to do Medicine?" I could not think of any answer quickly enough, so I said, "Because I don't like Physics!" I regretted the moment I finished saying that! The Professor looked at the other Professor and repeated with a wry face, "Because he does not like physics!" Then I was asked to leave as the interview was over.

I felt like crying. I went to my room and wrote a long letter about my interest in doing Medicine and came back and gave it to the clerk in the office and requested him to give it to the Professor of Public Health. He looked like a kind man. I have no idea whether that letter was given to the Professor or not.

I then spent a few sleepless nights!

My second choice was to do a Science degree and become a Science teacher. I was sure that because of my bad interview, I would not be accepted for Medicine.

I was also called for an interview by the Professor of the Faculty of Science. He was a nice man, and I frankly told him what had happened and hoped to accept my second choice. The Professor was kind, he asked me a few questions and finally looked at the result sheet and said, "The Sikh Community is not going to have a teacher, most likely a doctor".

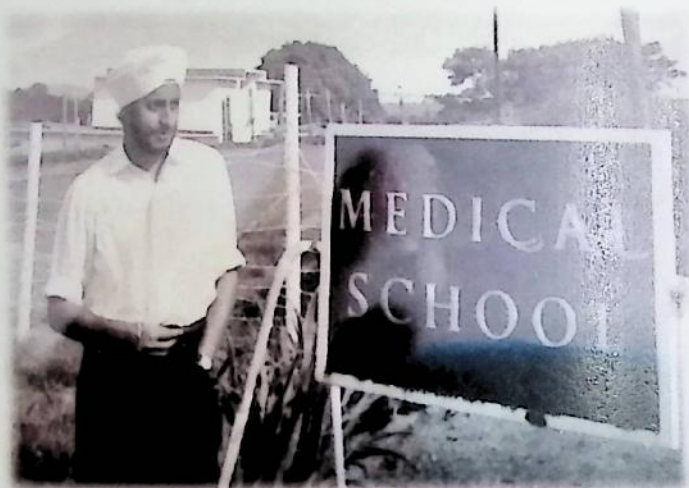
I left his office and did not fully understand what he was saying. He had reassured me that if I did not do Medicine, he would accept me into his department for a BSc degree.

The list of candidates with the results of who were accepted into various faculties was placed in the main building foyer.

I went there, extremely anxiously, and looked at the Medical list. I could not see my name on the list! I went temporarily 'blind'!

My friends patted me on the back and congratulated me and assured me that my name was there.

I settled myself and looked at the list again and found my name! "Thank God", I said.



**YAHOO  
!!!**

Obtaining admission into Medicine at Makerere was not easy by any means. I had worked extremely hard for this.

We had three months holidays before I started the first Medical year. I came home and earnestly started looking for a job. The family was managing okay on Pitaj's wages. He was working as a carpenter. I thought a bit extra would help a lot.

This was my best holiday ever. I had no worries about the future. My career path was set nicely. There was nothing to study at this stage. Some of my school friends, who did not pass School



Certificate, were already working in banks, post offices, the railways or in their shops if they had one.

I asked around and found out that a clerk was needed in the National Bank of England in Nakuru. A couple of my school mates were already working there so I applied, and the Manager called me for an interview. He gave a sheet of sums to do. They were at primary school level and I did them quickly. I also had to write an essay in English which was no problem for me. The Manager looked at my papers and was duly impressed. He asked me to start the next day. The wages were 400Sh a month (£20). I did not reveal that I was a University student.

I was given a desk in the back room. The work was easy. I had to enter the cheques cashed alphabetically in the register. There were no computers back then. All figures were entered by hand. These registers had to be balanced at the end of each business day. All clerks had to wait till the registers were balanced. Sometimes we had to wait back till 8pm while the books were being balanced. We were not paid any overtime. Wages were fixed and we had to work on Saturday mornings also.

The manager was a very strict looking Englishman. He never smiled. I think his name was Mr Thomas. Mr Thomas was impressed with my work and neat handwriting! I got my wages

in cash at the end of the month. I went home and handed all the money to Beeji. She was all emotional and had tears in her eyes. She did "*matha take*" to Guru Nanak Devji's photo in our house. The plot ladies asked Beeji, "Where does your son go each morning?" She had not told them that I had a job in the Bank!

I had requested my school fellow workers at the Bank to not to tell anyone that I was only working for three months and that I was studying at the University. If the bank found that out, then I would be sacked. This secret was kept well.

Three months soon came to an end. So, I gave my resignation in saying that I had to go to Nairobi to join my cousin in his business. The manager called me to his office and tried to convince me how great this job was, with a great future and good pension at the end. He even offered that after about a year the bank would send me to the UK for further training and I could eventually become a bank manager! He asked me to bring my father to the bank, so that he could explain to him about the benefits of working in the bank!

I felt bad for not telling them that I only wanted a holiday job. It could not be helped. The money I earned helped Pitaji and Beeji to buy things they needed.

# Medical School

**1957 - 1962.**

We returned to the Makerere College by train, as usual, to start the new academic year. I was all excited about my first step towards being a doctor.

The Medical school was located about 5 km away from the main campus. The school was adjacent to the Mulago Hospital, which was the Teaching Hospital of the University. It was also the main hospital in Uganda, where people came from all over the country for treatment. The majority of the specialists working there were University academics mostly from the UK. They truly believed in imparting knowledge.

The first two years of our Medical degree were to study preclinical subjects i.e. Anatomy and Physiology of the human body. The Professor of Anatomy was Professor Allbrook, a genuinely nice person and a devoted teacher. The senior lecturer in Anatomy was Dr Wilbert Chagula from Tanzania. He was highly intelligent and well spoken, and strict in marking exam papers. He had high qualifications from a UK University. We were about 30 students in the first year, and my school mate from Nakuru, Subhash, was also in the group.



The first time I saw a dead body was in the Anatomy dissecting room. It was a bit scary. We had to dissect the whole body and learn the structure over two years. The Physiology Professor was a kind Englishman. All the lecturers had their own research projects going on apart from student teaching. All our books, coats and dissecting instruments were given to us free by the Medical school. My Kenyan Government bursary covered all the other expenses. I did well both in Anatomy and Physiology. The year soon ended, and we were all promoted to the second year. We had three months of holidays again!

I was back in Nakuru and started looking for a job. I could not reveal that I was a University student. Nobody wanted to employ someone for only three months. The banks were out as I had already worked in a bank on my last holiday.

I had some school friends working in the KFA (Kenya Farmers Association). This was a large organisation, as the Rift Valley was mainly an agricultural economy. Many people worked in the KFA. I applied and was called for an interview by the General Manager who was an Englishman. All the high officers were English. After asking me a few preliminary questions he said to me "You passed your School Certificate at the end of 1954, and this is 1957, what have you been doing all this time?"

I was not expecting this question which was quite a reasonable thing to ask! I thought for a moment then replied that I had been working in Nairobi in my cousin's furniture workshops as an account keeper! He thought for a moment. I hoped he would not ask me any further details. Fortunately, he was a busy man, and he accepted my reply, saying that he understood that the furniture businesses were not doing well lately. So, he offered me a clerical job in the Accounts Office.

The head of the Accounts Department was a white South African. He was a strict person and not very friendly. My greatest worry was that he may find out that I was at the University and was in KFA for only a short time. I requested everybody who knew me to not to reveal this fact. They all knew me and respected me, and nobody let that out.

One of our neighbours in fact was a Chief Clerk in the KFA by the name of Mr Dukhia. I went to him and requested him not to tell the authorities about me being a student. He was very good, and I think they all wanted to help me. They knew of my modest financial circumstances.

The pay was good. I could handle all the work quite easily. My first job was to balance a few ledgers. I checked it and the additions were wrong. The manager was duly impressed. The

South Africans were installing a new accounting system which was a little complicated and the other clerks were finding it difficult to adapt to the changes. We had to put in overtime to finish the work. I was happy with it because this time they paid us for the overtime worked.

The first month I got a wage of 950 shillings! Pitaji's wages were still about 500 shillings. Pitaji and Beeji were greatly impressed when I handed them the envelope containing the wages. I had my own spending money from the University so all the money I earned went towards the family needs. The neighbours in the plot knew I was working. They congratulated Beeji about this.

I would work during the day and come home and study my Anatomy and Physiology. We had one small table and a chair for me to study. Bans and Amrik went to school as usual. I used to check their homework also and advise on writing better English essays which I was good at.

The holidays were about to end, and I felt guilty about having to think of another untruth and telling the KFA General Manager who was so good to me, that I had to resign. I had to give two weeks' notice of resignation. I was thinking of what to say when I heard the General Manager had blackwater fever due to malaria and was in the hospital. I felt sorry for him. It made it



easier for me to hand over my resignation to the South African Chief Clerk. He did not like me much. My colleagues were sorry to see me leave.

Second year Medical term started as usual. Same as previous year, but now there was more tension. Second year exams were more difficult, and it was a major step to move from the non-clinical stage to clinical where we started to learn to treat patients.

I was also offered to spend one year in an American Medical School. I declined this as it would have delayed my graduation by one year. I thought of the family and felt I should start earning as soon as possible. One year in an American University would have been good for me.

The following year I was elected to the position of Chairman of our Northcote Hall. This was a great honour. We held a ball and raised money for the Hall.

## The Student Guild

The Student Guild was a student body formed to promote student welfare. Every student had to be a member of this guild. The University authorities encouraged students to be a part of guild activities. The idea was to introduce the future leaders of East Africa to a democratic type of government based on the Westminster system. Most of the students were quite apathetic about the Guild. I was interested in student politics and took an active role in the guild. The Indian students considered this as a waste of time.

We used to have discussions about current African affairs and other social aspects. We discussed apartheid in South Africa. When Mandela was imprisoned by the white South African government, we held protest meetings. We as a body advocated a ban on South African goods. South Africa used to supply very high-quality canned fruit, breakfast cereals and fresh fruits. Unfortunately, because of the ban, the University stopped buying the breakfast cereals, which we missed! That was the price we had to pay.

I became a bit leftist in my thinking. I used to read articles about the South American political figure Che Guevara, Kwame Nkrumah of West Africa, and other revolutionary leaders of the

world. The world was at the peak of the Cold War. Russians used to send their literature to students about the benefits of a Communist type of government. The American embassy sent monthly newsletters to us about the Western system of government. We were all broke so equal wage for all workers and professionals was a very attractive policy.

The students, through the Guild, were sent invitations to study in the Eastern countries. The guild used to elect students to go to youth conferences all over the world. There was an organisation called World Assembly of Youth (WAY) with its headquarters in Paris. This organisation is still in existence. WAY used to hold conferences in different parts of the world and invite young leaders to participate in discussions about youth welfare and world politics. The Russians had their own similar organisation.

Our guild received an invitation to send one delegate to the next WAY conference to be held in New Delhi, India. All expenses including airfare, hotel accommodation, meals et cetera were paid by the WAY. I was elected by the student body to participate in the New Delhi meeting. I was elated, and at the same time also apprehensive about the second-year exams.

We had to get permission from the Medical School and the Chancellor of the University, who was Sir Bernard de Bunsen,



before we could travel overseas. The Medical Dean gave me permission because it was only for two weeks. He looked at my previous exam results and found them satisfactory.

Next, I made an appointment with the Chancellor. I had already sent an application in writing before the meeting. I sent all the information about the New Delhi meeting. I remember, when I entered the Chancellor's office, he made me sit opposite him and looked at me for a while. He went through the paperwork and said, "They elected you to go to this conference!", meaning the Africans were in the vast majority in the Guild Executive Committee, and he was surprised that they had elected an Indian to go overseas all-expenses-paid! There had been similar meetings in other parts of the world in the past where only African students had gone. So, he was greatly surprised. He smiled at me in a kind way, and said that I had his permission to go, as long I wrote a report upon my return about the meeting and submitted it to his office.

Sir Bernard de Bunsen of course knew all about me. When I entered this university in first year, he had made a speech to the press in which he mentioned that for the first time a Sikh student had been admitted to the University!

The Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth's mother, visited Makerere University in 1959. The Chancellor introduced me to the Queen as we all stood in a row to welcome her. I was taken aback. I did not know how to greet the Queen. So, I mumbled something like "Thank you, Madam". I did not say "Your Majesty". She was a pro. She shook my hand and smiled and moved on.



**The Queen Mother and Mr Bernard de Bunsen, in the foreground.**

**I am in the background, second from the left.**

The Secretary of State of Great Britain also visited the University at one time. Sir Bernard introduced me to him, and as I was a student leader, I was invited to the reception. Local and overseas political figures visited the University and spoke to the students.

It was a time of change in Africa. The British government had decided to make the colonies independent. Tom Mboya, the Kenyan Trade Union Leader also visited us and spoke to the student body. Tanzania's president Julius Nyerere also visited the University. I think they knew that the University was training potential future leaders of East Africa. The British, that way, were quite farsighted.



## **World Assembly of Youth Conference - Delhi**

I was all packed to go to New Delhi as a Ugandan Youth Representative to the WAY conference. I received the tickets and money from the Guild office. I caught a bus to go to Entebbe airport, the only airport in Uganda at the time. There was a small aeroplane which took us to Nairobi airport in Kenya, which was a bigger international airport. I caught another flight, Air India, to Delhi. I had never sat in an airplane before in my life. I was all excited and a bit apprehensive. In those days there was no direct flight to Delhi. The planes had to refuel on the way. So, we stopped first in Aden (Yemen) for refuelling. The plane then took off to Karachi in Pakistan then there was another stop to refuel. Everything was smooth sailing so far. Trouble started in Karachi. We were to catch a different plane to Delhi and had to go through a health check-up.

The Pakistani Medical Officer checked my vaccination certificates. He told me that I could not fly any further for five days because my yellow fever vaccination certificate did not mature for another five days. The rest was alright. It seems one needed to have yellow fever vaccination at least ten days before leaving Africa. I did not have that time in Kampala. It was night-time, so I pleaded with the Medical Officer to let me go, but he insisted that by World Health Organisation Rules, he could not

let me travel any further. So, I was sent to an "isolation" hospital near Karachi Airport by bus. I was a little frightened because it was night-time, and I had never travelled alone before.

The Isolation Hospital was not a bad place and it was quite clean. The place was surrounded by wire mesh to prevent any mosquitoes getting through. They gave me three good meals every day. It was really lonely as I was the only occupant of that institution. I had all sorts of morbid thoughts. I thought, what if they incarcerate me here permanently or send me to some other prison. I was a Sikh in a Muslim country and I felt quite vulnerable. Eventually, however, to my immense relief, on the fifth day the airport bus came and drove me back to the airport. They put me on a Pakistan airlines plane to Delhi. Unfortunately, I had missed the first five days of the WAY conference.



**Kampala** -  
**Entebbe** -  
**Nairobi - Aden -**  
**Karachi - Delhi.**

**A distance of**  
**6296 km!**



**Maidens Hotel**

After arriving at Delhi, I was put in a room at the Maidens Hotel nearby.

There were also other delegates at the hotel, all from different parts of the world.

I had to share the room with two other youths from Sweden. I cannot remember their names. They spoke reasonably good English. We would have breakfast at the hotel and then a bus would pick us up and drive us to the conference venue.

There were more delegates lodged in other hotels in New Delhi. There must have been close to nearly 300 delegates from all around the world. East Europeans did not attend this conference.

The conference was held in a huge complex in New Delhi called the "Vigyan Bhawan".





The Vigyan Bhawan Conference Centre. 'Vigyan Bhawan' means 'House of Knowledge'.

Hundreds of delegates representing their countries from around the world.



The conference was conducted in English and French.

Rows of interpreters were translating for various languages.



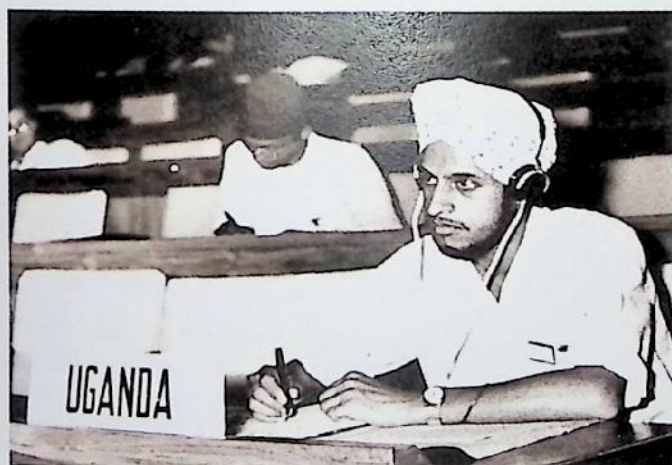
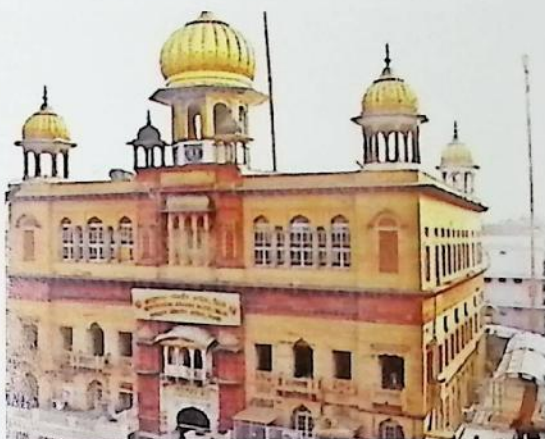
We discussed youth affairs from around the world. There were fiery speakers from Palestine. I was not aware of their problems at that stage. There were discussions about trade unions, unemployment, et cetera.

The delegates were taken around on buses to various places of interest in Delhi.

I took a rickshaw and went to the Sis Ganj Gurdwara one day to do *mathetake* and express

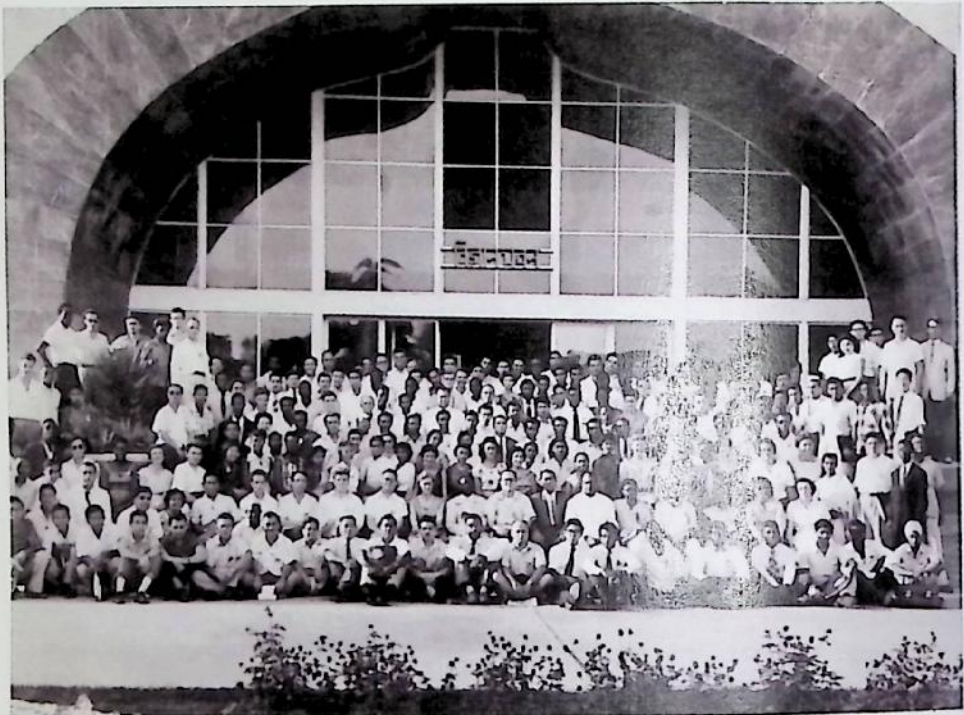
my gratitude to the Guruji for improving my life so much!

I enjoyed my stay in Delhi !!



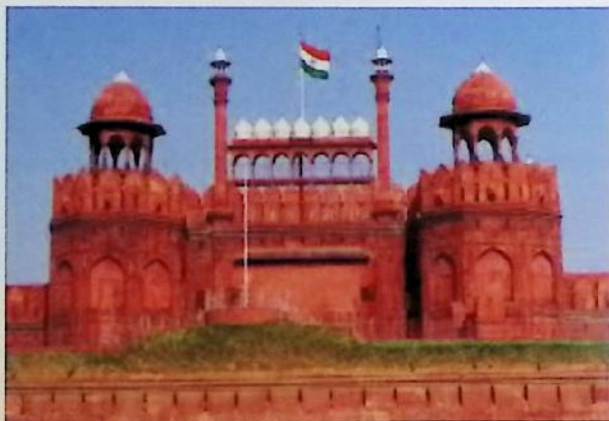
**The  
Representative for  
Uganda!**





**The entire group of delegates from around the world,  
in front of the Vigyan Bhawan Centre.  
I am seated front row, at the end, on the right.**

It was the middle of August and India's Independence Day came on 15th of August.



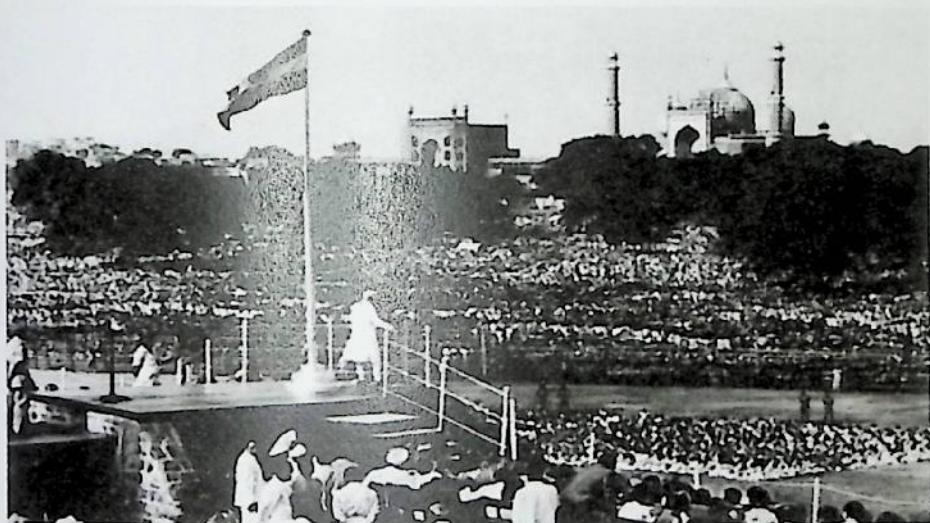
All the delegates were taken on buses to the grounds of the Red Fort in Delhi.

We were given foldable chairs to sit on.



Mr Jawaharlal Nehru made a speech from the Red Fort, which we could hear through the loudspeakers placed in different locations. This speech is now available on YouTube.

**Mr Nehru making his speech**



Indian leaders spoke to us during the conference. I met Indira Gandhi at the conference. The other leaders that spoke to us were Krishna Menon, the fiery defence minister of India. Acharya Kriplani, the opposition leader also spoke to us. He was criticising the Nehru government for not following the Gandhian policy. The American ambassador in India also invited the delegates to a big reception in the American embassy to mark the end of the conference.

I flew back with Air India, first to Karachi then Aden and then to Nairobi. We took a small plane to Entebbe.

The conference gave me a lot of confidence in public speaking. I had met a lot of interesting people. My Indian student friends were quite envious of me, as expected!

Back to Anatomy and Physiology! I missed two weeks of lectures and practicals. It took me a few weeks to catch up.

## KalaSingha

The African students were very friendly. They respected me. Africans always had good respect for the Sikhs. They called us "*KalaSinghas*", meaning "Sharp Sikhs". Apparently, this term came from a pioneer Sikh named Kala Singh who arrived in Kenya from Patiala in Punjab in the late 1890's to start a construction and hardware business in British East Africa. He fearlessly climbed mountains and traversed the harsher and more dangerous parts of Kenya on his own, especially into Masailand, where even the White man dared not venture.

His distinct and strange appearance curiously impressed the local tribes of the time with whom he came in contact with during the course of his work. Kala Singh always wore a turban around his head and sported a long flowing beard, this was a common trait of true Sikhs around the world and his sturdy, tough and adventurous personality left everyone in awe of him.

When asked who he was, he introduced himself by his name, and because language then was a challenge between two different alien cultures, the locals misunderstood his name as signifying his 'tribe', and because saying the name correctly could also have been uneasy for the locals, they started calling him, and all other Sikhs who looked like him (turban and long



beard) thereafter by the appellation "KalaSingha" verily a 'new tribe' in the land! His demeanour and way of interacting with the locals made them accept him like one of their own. As the decades followed, every turbaned and bearded Sikh began to be called KalaSingha."

In Swahili "Kali" means sharp. The Africans found Sikhs to be highly skilled and fast workers and thus very "sharp" in all activities of life. My fellow students at Makerere often called me "KalaSingha".

The Sikhs of Kenya have a very unique place in the heart and history of Africa because they are the only non-indigenous community to be called by a name that is not given to Sikhs anywhere else in Africa, or beyond.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Clinical Years**

Soon the exams came. It was an incredibly stressful time. The results would decide between another year of dissecting formalin loaded bodies or seeing real patients. Fortunately, I passed all the subjects. The examiner came from London University. I think about four to five students did not pass. Subhash passed the exams too, as well as Ramnik Shah who had failed this exam the previous year.



**I was pictured in a magazine article about the inter-racial harmony at Makerere University.**

This time we got about two months long holidays. A very relaxing time in my life. I did not have to study anything till next year. I tried to look for a job again but was totally unsuccessful. Nakuru was a small town there were not too many jobs around. I even went to the Department of Education asking for a temporary teacher's job, but they had none. The time however passed quickly. Soon we caught the special train back to Kampala to start the third year in Medical School.

I found this year remarkably interesting. We were using our pre-clinical knowledge to understand clinical problems. We were seeing patients. We were given new white coats and STETHOSCOPES!!

It made me feel like a doctor and patients often called me "*Dactar*"! They did not know I was just a junior medical student. My friend and I used to go to Kampala town carrying our white coats and displaying our stethoscopes to impress the shoppers! Sounds a bit silly now! Nobody stopped us and asked for any medical advice!

The year was easy as there was only one exam in Pharmacology at the end of the year. We spent time in the wards and clinics. My supervisor was a physician by the name of Dr Hutton. He was very strict. If he found us sitting in the library, he would



order us out and say, "Medicine is learnt in the wards, not in the libraries so go and examine patients in the wards!!"

I still took part in student politics. I was elected as the Chairman of our Northcote Hall. I was also the Hall Hockey Captain! Our hall won the annual Hockey competition.

### **Northcote Hall Competition Winners.**



**I am seated front row, 3rd from left.**

**To my right is Waruru.**

**He became the Chief of Defence forces in Nairobi and was Colonel Waruru.**

My Nakuru friend who was doing Medicine with me failed the 3rd year exam and had to repeat. His family was always a bit jealous of me. They would say that their son was very clever and better than Mehma Singh. I did not say anything. Subhash's failing the third year really embarrassed his family and they stopped making derogatory remarks about me forever!

The fourth clinical year was hard. I had to work extremely hard and eventually passed all the exams. There was a worldwide flu epidemic that year- 1961. A lot of university students fell ill. I also had high fever and had to be admitted to the University Clinic for a week. Fortunately, we all recovered.

The fifth year was very busy for us. There were only twenty of us left now, as ten had failed over the years. We were allowed to perform minor surgeries in the Outpatient Department. I liked doing surgery and was good at suturing. I had learnt how to tie a reef knot as a scout and used the same technique in surgery. We had to spend time doing night duties in the Emergency department. We also learnt Obstetrics and Gynaecology. I delivered nearly thirty babies during my three-month term! The rural African women were strong. They often delivered spontaneously in the casualty ward without any help.

I also spent time in the Eye Clinics and Eye theatre. The Eye Department was quite run down. There were two English consultants in the department. They did not seem to be interested in teaching. One of them used to smoke in the operating theatre. One was later disciplined for enucleating a healthy eye on a one-eyed African patient, removing the seeing eye. The Eye Department was so badly run, that I felt no inclination towards specialising in Ophthalmology! The surgical department under Professor McAdam was the best organised. I thought I would specialise in General Surgery. I liked making big incisions!!

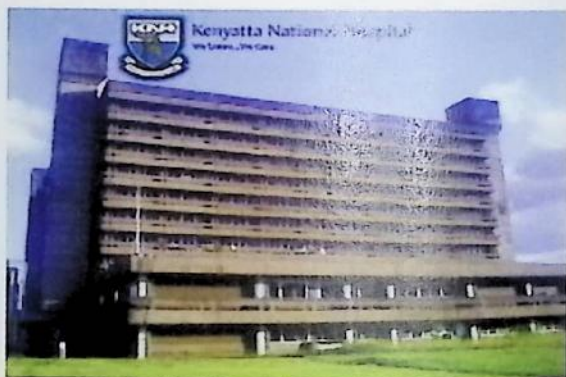
The final exams came rather quickly (April 1962). There were only twenty of us in the class now. The examiner came from the UK as before. I passed all the exams! It took a few days to realise that I, a village boy with no means, had realised his lifelong dream and become a doctor!



# A DOCTOR AT LAST!

## Internship Year

The Kenyan government wanted their students back to work in the Kenyan hospitals. I packed my two bedsheets and a blanket and a few clothes that I had and caught the train to Nairobi. I was appointed to do an internship at King George Hospital in Nairobi. This hospital was renamed Kenyatta National Hospital after Independence.



I reported to the main office of King George Hospital and had a short interview with the Medical Superintendent, Dr Matthew who was an English man, of course!

He directed me to the Junior Medical Officer quarters which were in a different building.

I remember Jijaji, Santokh Singh, and my cousin Sham Singh were with me. I saw the lady in charge who was a matronly middle-aged English lady. I was shown a very clean room with a nicely made bed with clean white sheets, it was the cleanest room I had ever seen. There was a white coat in the cupboard. There were about 10 rooms in this building. We had to share bathrooms. I was feeling more and more like a doctor!

The internship was for one year and consisted of six months of Surgery and six months of Medicine. There were Indians who had qualified from Indian universities. There was one Indian doctor who had qualified from Ireland, Dr Gupta. He became my friend later. There were also a couple of doctors who had qualified in the UK. A good mix. I must admit, I was a bit overwhelmed and anxious about my competence in competing with these people from overseas universities.

I soon realised our training at Makerere College was as good, if not better than the overseas graduates, especially those from Indian universities.

My first six months attachment was in the Surgical Department. There were two surgeons under whom I had to work. Mr Neville was an Irishman; he was very direct and an excellent surgeon. The other was Mr. Green, an Englishman. He was a Urological Specialist. He was also quite experienced and an excellent

surgeon. The department consisted of these two senior surgeons, one registrar, and an intern, that was me. The registrar was Dr Surjeet Singh Rana who had qualified from Amritsar in India. He had been qualified for about five years and had good surgical experience.

I had to attend clinics and assist in the operating theatres. I also had to be on emergency calls which we shared with other units in the hospital. We had to work long hours and there was no overtime payment! I was also responsible for records, patient histories, surgical reports et cetera. The consultants only came in for their clinics and surgical lists. Surjeet Singh and I virtually ran the unit.

We had regular ward rounds where I presented each patient to the consultant and informed him on the progress. We were accompanied by the Senior Sister on rounds. The consultant would quiz me about surgical treatments. Surjit Singh let me do a lot of surgery under his supervision. I had good steady hands. I could assist Surjit Singh and Mr Neville at the same time. Mr. Neville used to call me a magician. He was greatly impressed with my work. Both my consultants Mr. Neville and Mr. Green were happy with my progress and I finished the surgical term with great satisfaction.



The next six months was spent in the Medical Department under a famous physician, Dr Harris. Dr Harris was quite experienced. He had worked in Singapore for a few years and was good at Tropical Medicine. His speciality was Cardiology. He was difficult to please, but I managed that somehow.

We also had to watch out for the English Sisters who were in charge in every ward. Some consultants listened to them more than us Junior doctors! They were quite experienced in their work, but they often considered themselves more knowledgeable than the junior doctors. I always tried to be on the good side. A bad report to the consultant could ruin our future career.

The consultants were all white and very powerful. Our further specialisation was in their hands. If they did not recommend a Junior doctor, then he would not get a scholarship to go and train in the UK in Postgraduate Studies like FRCS/MRCP et cetera. Without these postgraduate degrees, the only opening was either to go into private practice as a GP or be sent to rural locations as a Country Medical Officer. Once you were in the country, there was little chance of being brought back to any major hospital in big towns. Smaller places did not have proper schools for their children. So often people would resign and try

to migrate to other countries. The government jobs were reasonably well paid with prospects of a good pension at the end.

My friend Gulshan Gupta got a good job with the Nairobi City Council as a Medical Officer in the Medical Department for Public Health. The council had their own Medical Department. Gulshan now lives in Essex, UK. They sent him to a small place called Embu, northeast of Nairobi. He got a good salary of nearly 4000 shillings a month. Good at that time because as interns we were paid 1200 Kenyan shillings a month. Half was deducted for boarding, and we got 600 shillings a month in hand. For me that was enough because I had nothing before. I did not spend much money. There was no life outside the hospital.

Six months in the Medical Department passed quickly. This was a more relaxed term. I was not as busy as in the Surgical Ward. Soon I would be a fully registered Medical Practitioner and I wanted to specialise in General Surgery. I had no idea how I was going to do it! About a month before we finished, the Government decided to increase the registrar positions at King George Hospital (Kenyatta National Hospital). I was allowed to apply for one of the surgical registrar positions. I had good reports from my surgical consultants, Mr Neville and Mr Green.

I was called for an interview by the Appointments Committee of the hospital. The committee consisted of Senior Surgeon Mr Gratten, Senior Anaesthetist Dr. Bhardwaj, the Medical Superintendent and representatives from Medical Headquarters in Nairobi. The Senior Matron in charge of nurses was also there plus a couple of other people, all white, except for Dr Bhardwaj, (he was Punjabi).

The Matron started off by asking "If you had a dispute with one of the nurses in the ward, how would you handle it?" Somehow, I was prepared for this so I said I would try to reason out calmly with the Nursing Sister, if it did not work then I would make an appointment to see the Matron! She had a big smile on her face! Dr Bhardwaj asked me about resuscitation of a patient who had cardiac arrest. I was prepared for that. He had given a lecture to us about resuscitation a few weeks earlier! That went well.

Then suddenly the Senior Surgeon Mr Gratten, who was the Head of the Surgical Department in the hospital and was very powerful, (he could make or break a doctor's prospects and the job depended on his final nod) asked "Why do you want to specialise in Surgery?" I had considered any question in my mind before that but not this obvious one! For a second, I did not know what to say so I blurted out "Because the results are quicker!" Everybody burst out laughing including Mr Gratten. He



said, "The results can be quicker in the wrong direction!" The interview ended there and then.

I was so worried that I thought the answer to the last question was not good - another nail biting wait.

The year ended and I was legally registered as a Medical Practitioner. I did not want to go into General Practice. I had to wait for the Selection Committee's decision about the registrar's job at the King George Hospital.

**Graduation, March 1962.**



One day I was walking around the hospital when I met Mr Neville who was my supervisor in the surgical term. He said, "Dr Manku what are you doing now?" "Well Sir, I am waiting for a job", I replied. "Come, I will get you a job" he said, took me to his car and drove to the European hospital. This hospital was exclusively for white people. All the nurses and doctors were white. Non-whites were not allowed to work in that hospital. One could be physically thrown out!

Mr Neville took me to the hospital Medical Superintendent's office who was a retired surgeon called Mr Barber. Mr Neville entered the office without knocking and said to Mr Barber who was sitting behind a large desk, "Give Dr Manku a job".

Mr Barber's eyes popped out. He had to obey Mr Neville who was on the Hospital Board. So, I was given a job to work in the Emergency Department of a European hospital. The first non-white doctor to work in this hospital!

There used to be one black and white tv in the common room. It was also the first time I tasted cocoa. It was okay. Meals were included in the job.

My job was to attend to all the emergencies. If I could not handle the case, then I was to call in the European Senior Doctor on call

on the day. In those days the European doctors, even though they had no postgraduate qualifications, were automatically considered as specialists. Non-white doctors had to work under them even if they had postgraduate degrees.

I worked there for almost two months. I was often on night duties. I remember one night an old English lady came in. Her blood pressure needed checking. She refused to get it done by me and said, "I want a European doctor to check my pressure!" "Okay", I said - it did not worry me.

Then I heard the good news that I was appointed as Surgical Registrar at King George Hospital. I think this was May or June 1963. I was really happy. Waheguru had been good to me as always.

I rented a three bedroom flat in Eastleigh Section 7, on the first floor in Wood Street. The whole family moved down to Nairobi.



**In the living room**



## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Engagement in India**

It is not much known that I was engaged in India at the mature age of eight years! When Pitaji told his older brother Narain Singh and family that he was planning to go to Africa again and take the family with him, they were upset. The reason given was that you will not come back, and they will never see him and the children ever again!

Nanaji was approached he said he had no objection; people do go overseas now and then, "Mehma Singh must go and do "Africa's education" (or get educated in Africa). Nanaji was very forward-looking. Always ahead of his time. Discussion went to and fro with his elder brother but Pitaji was adamant. None of Narain Singh's family had gone overseas after Grandfather. Was it envy or affection, I have no idea?

Eventually, to my horror it was decided that "Mehma Singh should be engaged now!" A girl should be found in India. That will ensure our return after a few years because a marriage ceremony will then take place in the village! Everybody was happy and enthusiastic except poor me! Nobody ever asked me. I told Beeji that I did not want to be engaged. I did not know

what it meant and why was everybody so happy! My feelings were overruled. There had to be engagement! So, they started looking into relatives' suitable eight-year-old daughters.

Eventually Dhian Kaur, Karnail Singh's wife, found a girl. She was the daughter of one of her distant Masis in the village of Raton, a few miles away from Dhindsa, our village. This girl was seven years old and was considered suitable, there was no clash of surnames. I had no idea what to do. Running away from home was no option as we were going to Africa soon!

So, on the designated day this "Nai" who was the family's message conveyor and matchmaker in the village of Raton was sent by the girl's parents to come to Dhindsa and bring the good news and sweets, mostly jaggery tied with a holy thread (*khamini*) and a scarf. I was asked to take a shower before the ceremony which I firmly refused. I won that! The compromise was to wash my face, hands and feet. This Beeji forced on me. I never wore any shoes in the village and the feet were always dirty.

The Brahmin Priest from the village who performed all such ceremonies for our extended family was called to perform the ceremony. I remember he really looked pleased with himself

because he was going to get food and one and one quarter rupees for the ceremony.

He cleared a place in the middle of the floor in our house and sprinkled some flour and said some mantra. Then he placed a stool which he had brought from his house in this duly prepared area. The stool had four legs about 30 cm high and was 60cm wide and 60cm long (square). It was called a "*chaunki*" and I was asked to sit in the middle of it. He put the scarf which the Nai gave him around my neck and recited some mantras. Then a piece of jaggery was put into my mouth and he said, "You are engaged!" Everybody was all smiles and happy. Pitaji and Beeji looked proudly at me. I was totally miserable. The Brahmin was given his food and then all the relatives had their food. The Nai from Raton was sent back with presents for the girl and her family the next day.

When I was in high school in Kenya, Nakuru, the girl's parents sent a message to Dhian Kaur that we should go back to India and perform the marriage ceremony. Pitaji and Beeji by this time had matured more in worldly ways and refused, saying that the boy had to study a lot more. Dhian Kaur was a little upset because the girl was related to her. They eventually married the girl elsewhere. I bet she did not even know my name and I was not told her name either!



## **CHAPTER 10**

### **Life in Nairobi**

Bans passed his Senior Cambridge exam in 1958/1959. He was a great help to the family when I was away at University. He would get up early and go to the local farm, where an African woman sold fresh milk. He would bring the milk home and then go to school. There were other neighbours' boys who accompanied him to the farm. Initially he was not tall enough to ride a bike while sitting on the bicycle seat. So, he used to put his leg beneath the central bar and ride the cycle sideways, quite a balancing trick!

Bans started looking for a job after school. There was a family living in the next room in the plot, who had a workshop in Thompson's Fall town. Their son and daughter were studying in school in Nakuru. The boy's name was Joginder (Jinder). He owns a real estate business in Southall now!

The children lived in Nakuru with the mother, and the father worked in the workshop. The father knew the bank manager in Thompsons Fall, and he arranged for Bans to work there. Bans had to move to Thompsons Fall as he could not get a job in Nakuru. I used to feel bad for him as he was so young and had never been away from home. Suddenly he had to grow up. He

managed this quite well living there alone for almost one year. The money was of great help in the house. By this time Pitaji was not getting a lot of work in Nakuru so Bans' contribution was a great help. Bans got a job in Nakuru in one of the firms as a clerk and moved back home for about a year. He was not happy working as a clerk there and wanted to go for further education. He started doing a correspondence course in communication at the Nairobi Technical College.

The whole family moved to Nairobi when I finished my internship at King George Hospital. I soon got a Surgical Registrar position at the Kenyatta Hospital. This job was a permanent government job. I was entitled up to 600 shillings per month for renting accommodation. There were not enough Government houses to go around. Only senior doctors got them rent free. My salary was about 1600 shillings per month, including the rent money. The flat on Wood Street in Eastleigh was a convenient location as Bhainji Banso, Santokh Singh and children rented a flat nearby in Eastleigh section 7, a two-minute walk from us.

Bans continued his studies and joined the Nairobi Technical School full time. Soon he was able to get a job in the Police as a Communication Officer. He had to travel to Kericho for his work. He continued his studies part time and was able to get admission to Norwood College in London to obtain a degree

related to Communication technology. Bans moved to the UK when I went to Australia for my postgraduate studies in Ophthalmology.

Amrik was in Form 2 at High School in Nakuru. So, when the family moved to Eastleigh, he was able to get admission to Eastleigh Secondary School starting in Form 2. This school was walking distance from our flat. Everything was working well now. We never felt short of anything.

I had bought an old Volkswagen car when I was doing my second, six monthly term at King George VI Hospital. The car cost me 3000 shillings. It was quite a lot of money at that time. I had about 2000 saved from my scholarship at Makerere plus my modest wage in the hospital. I borrowed 1000 shillings from Jijaji (Santokh Singh) and bought the car. I was feeling very proud! My own car! We only had two bicycles in Nakuru. I bet Beeji must have done Ardaas on my behalf!

Getting a driver's licence in those days was not easy. The driving examiners were mostly European. They discouraged too many Non-Europeans from driving. I think there was some bribery involved also. I failed my first driving test! I was so depressed! I had never failed any examination before. Anyhow I swallowed my pride and tried again, this time through a driving school. We



had to give extra money to the school, which I think they passed onto the examiner there. There was some connection as the examiner asked me the same questions the driving instructor had already told me!

The driving licence racket had been going on for a long time. Jijaji had tried to get a licence many times in Nairobi. He was a very good driver, but they would not pass him. Eventually through some contacts in Kisumu, he was able to get a driving licence from there. One of my intern friends at the hospital had sat seven times before he got a driver's licence (Dr YC Patel)!

## A Boy for My Daughter!

I was in the last term of 4th year Medicine. I went to the common room for medical students when somebody said there are some visitors for you. I was surprised as we did not get visitors at the hospital. I went out and saw Naranjan Singh (Granthi), Santokh Singh's father (Bhainji's father-in-law). I said "Sat Sri Akal" in surprise. He called me aside and said some people want to meet you.

There were three other men, two oldish and one was younger and clean-shaven. I had never met them before and was curious as to why they wanted to meet me. It turned out that the older man was Dev's father, Thakur Singh and the clean-shaven was her elder brother, Gurcharan Singh. The last man was Granthi's friend who lived in Kampala and had brought the group to the Mulago Hospital, our University Teaching Hospital. He knew the way.

I was in my white coat; with a stethoscope hanging out of the side pocket and must have looked like a doctor! Anyway, Dev's father came to the point. He said "We are looking for a boy for my daughter who is a schoolteacher. Do you plan to marry according to your own wishes or with the parents' advice?" I must say, I was taken aback! It was so sudden; I had not yet

thought about marriage. My forthcoming exam was my main concern. Granthi said you do not have to decide now. Think about it. He looked at Dev's father and said "*Teek hai*, are you satisfied?" Gurcharan did not say anything. Then they left. Dev's father seemed to be happy.

I finished Year 4 exams and came home for the holidays. Pitaji and Beeji asked me about Dev's father's visit to me in Kampala. I told them what had happened. They said, "What do you think?" I had not thought much about marriage but knew eventually a decision would have to be made. It was decided that I should go to Nairobi and see the girl. I would have liked to wait till I finish my education and start earning. I was advised that the family was good, and the girl is educated and good-looking. This was on Bhainji's advice who had seen Dev at some function or Gurdwara.

So, I went to Nairobi as I had three weeks holidays. I stayed with Bhainji. They had moved out of the joint family plot and were living in Eastleigh in their own rented accommodation. Bhainji again told me that the girl is nice and modest in her ways. Dev's mother had died quite a few years ago when Dev was about five years old. She was brought up by her grandmother. The grandmother had also died a few years ago and her father had remarried. So, Dev had a stepmother who was from Delhi and



could not speak Punjabi but looked like a nice lady. She was called "Mataji" by everybody.

Dev's dad was called "Bauji". The term "Bauji" is used for an educated man in Punjab. He was called so because he was the first educated man from his village of Gill, near Ludhiana. Bauji had training as a Surveyor and was really good at maths. His maths knowledge helped him with the complex calculations needed in quantity surveying. He did not go to University. I think he had a Diploma in Surveying from a technical institution in Ludhiana. He was able to get a good government job in the East African Railways.

He had five children. The eldest was Gurcharan Kaur who was married and lived separately with her family. Her husband worked as a carpenter in the railways. Next was Gurcharan Singh, he was on a high-grade job in the railways in the supply department in Nairobi. He was given a nice house by the railways as he was a "higher-grade" employee.

Next was Krishan. Krishan did not like his Sikh name and had changed his name to Kris. He had been studying structural engineering in the UK for a few years. He had also changed his surname to Jagden. He had not finished his final degree when he came back to Nairobi to live with the family. He eventually completed his degree by correspondence and got a job as a

structural engineer with the railways. Kris liked to repair cars as a hobby. The Citroen car was his special interest. Kris is quite intelligent and a good conversationalist.

Next was Hardev, and everybody called her Dev. She was born in 1939 in Voi, near Mombasa. This is a small place with a railway station on the main Mombasa - Nairobi Rail Line. Her father was posted there when she was born. The Second World War had started. It was considered safe to send the family to India for a while, so they went to India to live in their village house in Gill.

Bauji I think continued to work in the East African Railways and came home on holidays. He was entitled to free travel by sea, paid for by the railways. Dev's younger sister, Deesh (Jagdish Kaur) was born in India in 1943. She is about three years younger than Dev. Dev's mother developed severe pneumonia about three months after Deesh was born and died in Gill. Her mother's death really hurt Dev a lot. She was only three years old at the time. She does not talk much about it. Her grandmother was quite old but fortunately quite healthy, so she took over the mother's role and brought up the girls.

Bauji was in Africa at that time. He came and took the family back to Africa. He was a senior in the Surveying department of

the railways and was given railway quarters, a house, to live in. Gurcharan was sent to India to study before the war started and was in India when his mother died.



**Left to Right: Bauji, Gurcharan Singh, Gurcharan Kaur, and Dev's mother.**

**Seated are Kris, and Dev aged approximately 3.**



**Hardev aged 18**



**Duchess of Gloucester School**



**Form IV**  
**Dev seated front row on the left.**

Dev was a good student and did well in her studies. She got admission to Duchess of Gloucester School, which was the best school for girls in Nairobi. She finished her Cambridge School Certificate there getting credits.

Dev attained admission to the Nairobi Teachers Training College. This was a government run institution to train teachers to teach primary school students up to Class seven. She did quite well and finished her two-year course getting good grades.

She secured a position as a teacher in Nairobi Khalsa School to teach Year 7 students. She was able to get exceptionally good results for her class in their Kenya Preliminary Examination. This was the final primary school year as the students went to High School after that.





# KHALSA BOYS' & GIRLS' SCHOOL

(SIRI GURU SINGH SABHA, NAIROBI)

Racecourse Road,

TELEPHONE 25634,

P. O. BOX 494,

Ref: No. \_\_\_\_\_

NAIROBI 27th February, 1967

(Kenya)

Mrs. Hardev Kaur Manku,

Dear Madam,

The Sabha and the Education Committee note with extreme pleasure the 100% result that you have shown in Standard VII A, in the Kenya Preliminary Examination 1966. This remarkable achievement is only due to your persistent hardwork and devotion to duty. The Sabha is always blessed of conscientious teachers like you and feels proud of their achievements.

On behalf of the Sabha and the Managing Committee I congratulate you for this achievement.

I am sure that you will continue to work hard with the same zeal and maintain your very high standard, which will be a shining example to your colleagues.

*Sohan Singh*  
MANAGER.



**Khalsa School teachers.**



**Dev is in the back row, 4th from the left.  
The school principal is front row, 3rd from left; she lives in the UK**



**With teachers  
at the  
Khalsa  
School.  
Dev is 2nd  
from right.**

The teachers were all female, and it was considered respectable to teach in the Khalsa school. Some girls after High School got jobs in banks or other companies where most of the employees were men. These jobs were frowned upon by the community as the girls had to work with the men and there was risk of getting into relationships not approved by their family.

When I was introduced to Dev, she had been teaching for about a year. A meeting was arranged for us at Dev's house in the railway quarters in Nagara where they lived. It was evening time and Jijaji took me to Dev's house.

We had some tea and then I was led to a separate room, I think it was the kitchen/dining area. There sat Dev across the table on a chair. She looked a bit nervous. I was asked to sit opposite her on another chair across the table. Then we were left alone! I looked at her and found her quite attractive. I do not remember what we said to each other, but we talked for about one hour! Now and then Kukku, Gurcharan's eldest son would come and talk to us. He was about eight years old.

Soon we went back to Sister's house. I had made it clear that Dev was not to be forced into this relationship and should make up her own mind. She was acceptable to me. I also said I would not marry until I had a proper job as a doctor.

The next day Dev's father either met Jijaji or called him on the phone and said that the relationship was acceptable to all in their family. I got Dev's address and promised to write to her and then I went to Nakuru and then back to University to do my final year at Med School.

We wrote to each other. I noted Dev had good handwriting! I do not remember what we wrote to each other! Photos were exchanged.



**The first photo given to Dev.**



I came home after first term and heard that Dev's family were coming to do the Sagan for the engagement. I agreed and wanted to get it over with. We were still all living in one room even though I was about to be a doctor. It did not embarrass me the least, I wanted the family to see how we lived, so that when we are married, she would not have very high expectations. It was a small ceremony in the room. We did not invite any neighbours. I was given the Ladoo in my mouth and some money and we were engaged! Dev was in Nairobi and not allowed to attend the ceremony! No photos – no cameras! I do not think even a Giani was called.

Dev and her family lived in a three-bedroom house with a large yard at the back and front. I was a bit surprised that Dev's father had accepted our modest lifestyle. He must have seen a future in me. I would be a doctor soon, of course! I went back to the University and soon became very busy with the final year exam preparations.

Deesha got married to Harbans Singh Mudan who was a clerk in the bank. This happened while I was doing Internship at King George Hospital in Nairobi. I could not attend the wedding because I think I was on call.

I saw Dev about three or four times during my year of internship. Once I went to her house by bus, of course! Once she picked me up from the hospital and we drove around. She had a car and could drive. Dev's father was not quite happy about us meeting much before marriage!

Soon after Deesha was married, I started getting messages through Jijaji that I should decide on marriage as soon as possible. I was an Intern, getting about 600 shillings (£30) a month. I could not contemplate marriage yet. I think Dev's family expected us to marry as soon as I came to Nairobi to do my Internship. I lived in the doctor's mess in a small room and certainly could not think of bringing Dev there. We were not allowed to have wives or husbands living in those quarters. All the interns, I think, were unmarried!

One day Dev's dad and Kris, her younger brother, came to my room at King George Hospital to ask me about a date for marriage.

I tried to explain my situation to them. They were not happy! I told him that I would marry after I finish my internship. Then I had to get a job after I finished the internship. I may be posted outside Nairobi. I had no money!

Kris was angry. He said, "Do you want to call this engagement off? Tell us now." Bauji was angry with Kris and asked him to leave the room. I think I was able to convince him of my situation and the reasons for not being able to marry soon. There was pressure from Jijaji's side also.

I think people had the wrong impression about doctors' incomes. Lots of GP's in Nairobi of course, had big cars and lived in big houses. Not me with £30 wages a month!



## Registrar's Job

The Internship finished in May 1963 and I was a fully registered qualified Medical Officer. Still totally broke! I was however able to buy a Volkswagen beetle with a small loan from Jijaji.

Once I got the registrar job, I agreed for marriage, which was planned for 11th of August 1963. The registrar job was a permanent and pensionable position with the Kenyan government. I think my wages were about 1200 shillings a month plus I was entitled to government sponsored accommodation. The government paid me 600 Kenya shillings per month for renting accommodation. That was my full entitlement. I was able to rent a three bedroom flat in Eastleigh on the first floor of a building owned by a Sikh businessman.

From Nakuru the family moved into this flat. I could see they were all very happy, as now we were in a "big" house, quite a change from one room living in Nakuru. Bans and Meekay shared a room, the next was for Beeji and Pitaji and I had my own room. There was a small kitchen, two bathrooms and toilets plus there was a small storeroom, which Beeji used for prayers. The car had to be parked outside.

Eastleigh was not the top Indian suburb in Nairobi. I could only afford that area at that stage plus it was near Bhainji/Jijaji's house. We were close to Sister's family. Pinder, their eldest daughter, spent primary school years living with us, first in Nakuru and later in Nairobi. Once she passed the Kenya Preliminary Exam, she moved back with Bhainji and the rest of the children, Amarjeet and Ravi. Paul, the youngest son, was born when I was doing Internship at King George Hospital (1962).

Pitaji had been working almost seven days a week since the age of 12! I felt that now I was a doctor, he had a right to relax. So, I asked him to retire and enjoy a retired life. He was happy with that. He was only 55 years old at that time.

## Marriage

Marriage ceremonies were a simple affair in Kenya. We did not have to do anything from my side. The girl's side had to arrange for the place of ceremony and provide lunch to the relatives and the "*Baraath*" (wedding guests of the groom). The marriage ceremony was in the Gurdwara.

In our case Dev's family arranged for the wedding to be performed in a hall owned by the Lohana Community. It was a big hall and had parking outside. It was called the Lohana Mahajan Mandal Hall. The Giani was called from the Gurdwara.



**The Lohana Mahajan Mandal Hall**



## Our Wedding Ceremony



Our wedding ceremony was a proper Sikh marriage ceremony and did not take long. There were four *Laava* and then *Ardaas*.

There was lunch after the ceremony.  
This was provided by Dev's family.  
Kewal made a movie of the  
marriage ceremony.



Dev brought a bed, a gas cooker, cupboard, sofa set and a TV as dowry even though we had not asked for any such thing. The articles were welcome because we did not have these of our own. The flat looked quite full.

Dev continued teaching at Khalsa School as before and I had my Surgical Registrar job at Kenyatta. I would drive her to the school in the morning and pick her up at the end of the day.

One day we were driving home after visiting Dev's family and I stopped the car at the traffic lights and waited for the green light to turn on. Dev's window was open and an African put his hand

through the window and grabbed her gold necklace that she was wearing that day. She quickly put her hand on the necklace and fortunately the light turned green and I moved the car forward. It was a split-second job. I did not even know what had happened. Luckily, the African did not have proper grip on the necklace and could not pull it out. Lucky!! Thefts like these were quite common in those days. Fortunately, there was not much violence.

One night we were sleeping comfortably at night when at about 3am I heard a loud noise downstairs. I looked out of the window and saw two Africans running away with two of my VW wheels. We called the police. They came after about 1 hour. The first sentence the police officer uttered was, "Have you caught the thieves?" Such robberies were quite common in Nairobi. There was a market for stolen goods! I had to buy two second-hand wheels for the car. They were not mine! The thieves were never caught! Jijaji then made an alarm for the car which would beep loudly if the car was moved.

We managed quite well on mine and Dev's wages. We had nearly 1200KSh between us per month. People living near us soon knew I was a doctor, so I had a little private practice going. I used the free medical samples that were given by the pharmaceutical reps for the practice. I think some of the families thought I was a good doctor. The plot owner where Bhainji lived



often called me for house visits about the family's medical problems. They used to pay me cash for each visit. I did not want to do general practice, but the extra cash was always welcome.

Meekay gained admission to High School at Eastleigh Secondary School which was walking distance from where we lived. Bans started full time studies at the Nairobi Tech in telecommunications. Bans was soon able to get a job with the Police as a telecommunications officer. He was stationed in Kericho. I think he went there by bus. I encouraged him to save his wages as he was planning to go to the UK for further studies. I did not ask for any money from Bans.

Soon Dev was expecting Veena! She made a special maternity dress for herself which she wore when going to work at the Khalsa School! A Goan obstetrician was recommended to me by Dr Gupta, my friend from Internship days. Dev attended for prenatal check-ups with him. Veena was born in July 1964.

The hospital rang me one evening when Dev went into labour. She was admitted to a private hospital where her obstetrician worked. I drove to the hospital in quite a hurry, parked in the hospital car park and rushed into the hospital. I forgot to switch

off the car lights which stayed on till I came out after Veena was born. Fortunately, the car started up again ok!

I think the delivery was easy. Veena weighed 3kg or less, we were very happy to see our first child! Beeji and Pitaji were also very happy. Beeji gave ladoos to the relatives for her first grandchild. Dev took a few months off work.

Veena was no trouble as a baby. She slept well and was soon crawling around the flat. One weekend we were all at home and Veena stood unsupported! She was only 9 months old. I said "Veena come to me" and she walked a few steps. That was a mistake. She stood and walked on the same day! Veena was a pretty child.

Beeji advised Dev that a tiny black dot of eyeshadow or *surma* should be marked just behind her right ear. This would prevent her from getting the "*Nazar*", Evil eye!

Dev hand sewed nice dresses for her. I still remember the glow on Dev's face when Veena first said "Mama"! Veena started talking at about 2½ years of age. She kept us entertained at home. We had good babysitters, Beeji and Pitaji. Dev and I would go to the drive-in movies every now and again.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Head & Neck Registrar**

I was attached to the Surgical Unit under Mr. Gratten, the Senior Surgeon. He was the Head of the Department and had asked for me to be in his unit. He must have been impressed by my interview for the registrar position. A job with Gratten meant about 100% chance of getting a scholarship and going to the UK for FRCS studies. He was very influential. Unfortunately, Mr Gratten soon migrated to Canada as Independence had come to Kenya. Lots of European consultants felt that it would be better to move out of Kenya if possible.

The surgeon who replaced him was a Scotsman called Mr Cathro. Mr Cathro let me do lots of surgery on my own even though I was a Junior Registrar. That made me quite confident with the surgical knife. I was better than the other registrars. I also had to be on call for surgical and medical emergencies.

One night I was on call and was told there had been a tribal battle, and there were lots of injured patients for me to attend to. When I went to the hospital that night, there was a whole ward of injured patients and about 25 most of them had wounds from machetes, others were more serious, broken bones and one had



penetrating abdominal injury involving liver damage. I was able to fix all of them including the abdominal injury.

I was operating the whole night! I thought I would be congratulated by the hospital administration for handling so many serious injuries without calling the consultant. That was not to be. I was called by the Medical Superintendent, Dr Matthews, and he was annoyed that I had not called in the consultant as the press was ringing them about news of these people and none of them knew anything about these patients.

Anyway, all the patients did well except the one with liver injury. He died after a few weeks.

When the six-month attachment with Mr Cathro was over, I was hoping to join another Surgical Unit. This was January 1964. The Medical Superintendent called me and told me that I was to be Mr Clifford's registrar for the year. I said I want to do General Surgery and not Head and Neck. He insisted that that is what has been decided so there would be no choice.

Mr Clifford was the head of the Head and Neck Department. He had a reputation of being very strict and rude and hard on the registrars. Nobody wanted to work under him. His last registrar was an English doctor, Dr Duff who had resigned and was

moving to South Africa, so I had to do that job! So, I moved to Mr Clifford's unit. This was the busiest unit in the hospital. We did Neurosurgery, ENT and Head and Neck. Mr Clifford was very well respected by the administrators. One had to be on his good side. One bad word from him could ruin one's career and future prospects of becoming a consultant.

When I joined the Head and Neck Unit, Dr Duff still had about four weeks before he moved to South Africa. He showed me the ropes about running the department. His first words to me were, "Keep Peter Clifford happy and no one can touch you in this place, the best way to impress Peter is to show him that you sleep in the wards. Be there before him and leave after he has left the hospital! Once he is happy you can kill anybody, and he will support you. Peter is a good man."

Now I was newly married and advised to spend all the time in the hospital! Anyhow I took that advice very seriously. I worked out Peter's routine quickly. I was always one step ahead of him. Soon, I realised that he was a kind man. All he wanted was to bring out the best in his registrar. He encouraged me a lot and he let me do a lot of surgery. We did Neurosurgery, mostly head injuries. I became quite confident at opening the skull and dealing with serious brain injuries. We also did ENT. I was able to do tonsils very quickly.

Duff had advised me to get my own letterheads printed and send bills to private patients, which I promptly did. I had a little private practice going on the side. Peter Clifford did not mind that.

A European sister once tried to bully me, and I stood up to her. She reported me to Peter Clifford. He turned back and told her that he had full confidence in me, his registrar and I should not be questioned by the Sisters. The European Sisters were immensely powerful in those days. Most of them were middle-aged English women.

After about six months a Muslim doctor, Dr Khan, who had a diploma in ENT from the UK joined our unit. He was senior to me by a few years. We got on well. We also did a lot of work on Head and Neck cancers. Burkitt's lymphoma of the jaw in children and cancer of the nasopharynx were not uncommon. We treated these with surgery and chemotherapy. Radiotherapy was not available in the country at that time.

Mr Clifford got an international grant to travel to the USA, Australia, Japan and other countries to observe their units treating Head and Neck cancer. He was internationally well known. Teams of Head and Neck Surgeons and Oncologists used to visit us from the USA from time to time. Peter Clifford



had published lots of papers on Head and Neck cancer in international medical journals and so was well known internationally.

Before going away, he called Dr Khan and me to his office and told us that he will be away for three months and the two of us will have to run the department. He made me in charge of the Head and Neck Unit and gave Dr Khan ENT patient care. I think Dr Khan was disappointed as he was senior to me by a few years and expected to be named Head of Department. Clifford knew I was quite bold in my surgery and before leaving he said, "You can do anything you want but remember we are covered by WHO standards!" I never knew what he meant! I handled all the head injuries and Head and Neck cancer. I was in the hospital a lot. Dev was good, she never complained! Sometimes I had to spend whole nights dealing with serious head injuries.

Peter Clifford came back after three months and looked quite refreshed. He did a ward round with me and was happy with what I had been doing. Once we finished the ward rounds, he said "You know as much about treating head injuries as anybody in the world!" He asked me in which part of the world did I want a job. He would arrange it in the USA, UK or Australia?

Then he asked me, "What do you want to specialise in?" I blurted out in the usual way, "General Surgery" He started laughing. He said "You should look around and see how many General Surgeons there are - many. How many Neurosurgeons, ENT and Eye Surgeons are there? Just a few who are doing big cases and are rich". That made me start thinking!

When my one year with Clifford was finished, Clifford advised that I should do about six months in the Eye Department because it would be useful in my further work in ENT and Head and Neck. He knew he had turned my mind about general surgery. So, Clifford talked to Dr Bisley, the Head of the Eye Department and arranged a job for me in the Eye Department. Mr Clifford gave me a cheque for 600KSh (not sure of the amount) from his International Grant Account and told me to keep it confidential as he had not given anything to Dr Khan. That was a great help at the time. I had a little private ENT practice on the side. We were doing well! We could afford to have chicken at least once a week.

Soon the country became independent. King George Hospital was renamed to Kenyatta National Hospital. The administration had slowly passed into African hands.

## The Eye Department

In January 1965, I joined the Eye Department as a Junior Registrar. The department consisted of a consultant Dr Bisley an Englishman, a Senior Registrar who had done DO in London, Dr. Awan, a Muslim doctor, and a part-time Ophthalmologist, an English doctor by the name of Mr Philip Morris. Dr Morris qualified as a General Surgeon and later switched to doing eyes. He had a private practice in Nairobi city consisting mainly of European patients. He only came to operate and did not do any clinics at Kenyatta Hospital. There were also two experienced African assistants, who were not doctors. They had been working in Eyes for years, even before Dr Bisley came to Nairobi.

Both Dr Bisley and Awan were good surgeons with many years of experience behind them. The plan was for me to work in Eyes for six months and then go back to the Head and Neck unit with Mr Clifford. Then Mr Clifford would arrange a scholarship for me to go to train in Neurosurgery or ENT in the UK. Mr Clifford could easily do that as his voice was strong at the Medical Headquarters.

When I started work in the Eye Department, I felt that this is the place I wanted to be. I enjoyed eye surgery straightaway. There were hardly any night calls. I spent a lot of time with the family!



If Mr Clifford had not arranged for me to do this job, I would not have known about Eyes! With Clifford I spent most of the nights at the hospital dealing with Head and Neck trauma, which was very common in Nairobi. I had to open a skull every other day to drain blood and repair the injuries. In the Eye Department there was no such thing. The first few weeks I was on call, I used to ring the hospital to see if there were any emergencies for me to attend.

I soon realised that I wanted to be an Ophthalmologist, not a Neurosurgeon! I picked up the clinical and surgical work quite quickly which surprised Dr Bisley a lot!

There was a long-standing arrangement with the Royal Blind Society that when a registrar had worked for 12 months at Kenya Eye Unit, he would be offered a scholarship to go to the UK and qualify for a Diploma in Ophthalmology. The scholarship was substantial, as it paid for airfares, accommodation and any courses that had to be attended by the candidate, plus pocket money. They also paid for any books needed for the course. Most candidates in the past had successfully passed the diploma exam and returned to work in Kenya.

It would have been so good for me and after a year I could come back to Nairobi and work as a consultant in the Eye Department. I got the necessary forms and filled them in and sent them to the Royal Blind Society headquarters in London. The application had to go through the Ministry of Health Headquarters in Nairobi. They got the necessary references from Dr Bisley and forwarded the forms to the Blind Society in London.

I waited and waited; no reply came so I went to the Medical Headquarters to make enquiries about my application. I met the Executive Officer at the Ministry and asked about my scholarship. He said, "Your application has not been successful." I said "Why? I meet all the requirements and the consultant Dr Bisley told me he had recommended me for the scholarship." The Executive Secretary laughed and said, "What Dr Bisley has told you is not what he has written in support of your application."

In short, Dr Bisley had not supported my application! This had not happened before. I could not explain why Dr Bisley would not support me. Then I realised he was feeling threatened by my enthusiasm. He was about to retire and wanted to extend his stay in Kenya. He had already reached retirement age. He felt that if I got my diploma and came back, the Government will

replace him with me and his service in Kenya would not be extended!

Dr Awan was senior to me, but he was an easy-going person. He had been a Senior Registrar for years and would not mind staying in that role forever! He was a good man. I learnt a lot from him, but he had no great ambition. Bisley had read that all and noted that I may not be so passive. So, he did not support my application even though he reassured me that he had done so.

Another obstacle in my way! I did not lose faith in Guruji. Then Bisley went on overseas leave for three months. God had other plans for me. There appeared an advertisement in the paper from the Australian Government. Australia had relaxed its "Whites only" policy and were asking for non-white candidates from overseas to study in Australia. These candidates would be eligible for the British Commonwealth Scholarship which would cover all expenses. The scholarship was to commence in 1966. I think this was about November 1965. I applied for the scholarship and papers had to be given to the Australian High Commission who would then forward them to Canberra. The scholarship was meant for Kenyan Africans.



The scholarship was given through the Ministry of Health in Kenya. I was called for an interview at the headquarters. There were other candidates, all African. When I entered the interview room, I noticed that the committee consisted of African academics and representatives from the Kenya Government. I was surprised to see the Head of the Interviewing Committee to be the Professor of Geography from Makerere University! I knew him in Kampala through his wife who was our domestic bursar for Northcote Hall. She was a very nice African lady. I was the Chairman of the Hall and used to meet her regularly to discuss students' needs. She introduced me to her husband who was also a very friendly person.

The Professor recognised me immediately and said "Hello Manku, so you want to go to Australia for further studies in Ophthalmology." I said I would very much like to.

There were a few more questions about my return to Government Service. At the end, I did not feel very hopeful.

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Post Graduate Studies in Australia**

To my surprise in a few weeks, Dev received a phone call at home from the Australian High Commission stating that I had been awarded the British Commonwealth Scholarship to study in Sydney. I was also phoned by the Secretary of the Ministry of Health. This was December 1965 and the academic term started in January 1966!

I started getting ready for a health check-up et cetera. Bisley came back from his holiday. He found out what had happened in his absence. He even told me that he had phoned the Australian High Commission saying that I was not a Kenyan citizen! He told me that they did not mind. Now why did he have to ring the High Commissioner? Still trying to obstruct my progress.

Everything was going according to plan. It was about three weeks before my departure to Australia when I received a call from the Ministry of Health. They said they had allowed me study leave for two years, however because I was not a Kenyan citizen, they would not be paying my salary to my family! That put the whole plan in jeopardy. What will the family live on?

So, I went to the Citizens Department Office and renounced my British Citizenship and applied for Kenyan Citizenship, which I got straight away. Next was to get a Kenyan passport. I needed it quickly as time was running out. The Australian High Commission had already sent me the air tickets to fly to Sydney.

I went to the Kenyan Passport office to get the passport. I was worried whether I would get the passport in time.

I was walking around the passport office to get the necessary forms, when a Mr Chaudhury came to me and greeted me and asked me what I was doing there!

To go back a little about 18 months. I was working in the ENT clinic when a man brought his son of about eight years old to my clinic. This man was Mr Chaudhury whom I later met in the Passport Office. Mr Chaudhury said that he had only one son and he was worried about him. The boy looked quite pale and weak. He had been having nosebleeds for nearly 12 months. Mr Chaudhury had taken him to several doctors in Nairobi, but the nosebleeds had continued, and the boy was getting quite weak. He begged me to do something to stop the nose bleeding. I was only a Registrar and had worked in ENT for only six months. How could I fix something which senior doctors had failed to do? I pretended to be confident and examined the boy.



It was sheer luck; I found a bleeding vessel in the nose. I was able to cauterise it quickly and hope that it would work. I never saw Mr Chaudry or his son after that. I assumed they must have gone to another specialist.

This was the first time I saw Mr Chaudhury since then. He looked happy and told me that he and his family were utterly grateful and indebted to me for fixing their son's nosebleed! No other doctor could fix it! His son was healthy now and doing well at school.

I told Mr Chaudhury about my problem and said I needed the Kenya Passport quickly. He laughed and said "I am the Senior Passport Officer here; I can help you. Go and get two passport photos straight away." I went and got the photos. I returned and he already had a Kenyan Passport in his hand and asked me for my details which he filled into the passport. He took the photos for me and put some glue on one of the photos and stuck it in the passport. He handed me the passport, again thanking me about his son. I came home with a new passport, and when I opened it my photo fell out! The glue was still wet! I picked it up and stuck it back in the passport. It has stayed stuck since then. Another miracle!

I took the passport to the Ministry of Health and showed them that I was a Kenyan citizen now. The officer changed my paperwork so that my family in Nairobi will get my salary in full while I was studying in Australia, which would be about two years. I was happy that my family will be financially comfortable in Nairobi, while I was away.

Pitaji had stopped working when I qualified. Bans and Meekay were studying. Bans was actually planning to go to the UK soon. He got admission to a college in London to study Telecommunications. Meekay had just passed his Senior Cambridge Exam in Year 10, achieving a first grade. He was going to study further in Nairobi Technical College to do the equivalent of the HSC which was recognised by Universities in the UK for admissions to degree courses.

The day came when I had to fly to Australia. I was booked on British Airways up to Bombay in India and then on Alitalia via Bangkok to Sydney. It was quite a traumatic time for me, leaving the family behind especially Dev and Veena. There was no alternative. I had to take this opportunity where all expenses were paid for by the Australian Government and the Kenyan Government paid my salary to the family in Kenya. I felt like crying at the Nairobi Airport but Dev bravely said, "No crying or everybody will start crying." So I controlled myself.



The flight was uneventful. I landed in Sydney. I think it was the 3rd of January 1966 and a nice sunny day. It was summer in Australia. I was met by a representative of the Australian Government at the airport. They had an office in the airport for foreign students. Students were arriving from other countries for further studies as I was doing. The Australian Government had decided to open their doors to foreign students. The White Australian Policy was weakening!

I was taken from the airport to an apartment building on Bondi Beach! It was a multistorey building, and I was given a room there. This building has since been demolished and a new one built. There was a group of students from Korea there. They were friendly with me because I could speak English and I helped them communicate with the Australians as the Koreans' English was poor.



**Bondi  
Beach in  
the 60's**



The next day we were taken to an office in Sydney City in a bus. There were other students, mainly Asian. We were given a lecture on Australian culture! We were told about the curious slang! G'day!!

The following day I was taken in a taxi to the Sydney Eye Hospital in Woolloomooloo, where I met Dr Frank Claffy who was the Director of Ophthalmology and he became my supervisor. He showed me around the hospital and introduced me to the other resident doctors, all Australian, who were also training in Ophthalmology. They were all friendly and a bit curious about my turban! The Eye Hospital has since moved to Macquarie Street in the City.



**Looking towards Sydney City.**

The old Sydney Eye  
Hospital, .

Woolloomooloo.



I had to attend clinics and operating theatre sessions. I was given the necessary books which were needed for the D.O. (Diploma in Ophthalmology) Sydney course. There was a library which we could use for reading journals et cetera.

My scholarship was \$37.50 per week. I soon had to move out of the Bondi Beach Hotel and find a room in Glebe. There were lots of students living in Glebe because it was near Sydney University. The houses were mostly owned by Greeks and Italians who had migrated after the Second World War ended in Europe.

Some of these European migrants were quite enterprising. They bought houses in Glebe and surrounding suburbs which were mostly dumps and converted them for student accommodation. The family would live in the front part of the house and rent the back room to students. We had to share the kitchen and

bathrooms. The houses were full of cockroaches. The rent was \$5 to \$7 per week.

We did our own cooking. I had no experience with cooking! I tried hamburgers for about a week or so and got fed up with that food. There were some Indian students living nearby and they taught me the basics of Indian cooking and I managed, though not well! Aloo-mattar was the most common curry I made and ate with bread. One could buy a loaf of bread for 10p. The currency at that time was pounds and pence like in the UK. The decimal currency was introduced late in 1966. Some of the migrant communities had difficulty in adjusting. They did not know the difference between pounds and kilos, and the shopkeepers in Glebe were mainly Greek. We somehow managed.



**Old Australian currency.**



I used to take a bus to the Eye Hospital, it cost about 30c. Sometimes if it was a nice day, I would walk about 6 km to work. Mostly I would take the bus and get off at Martin Place then walk through Hyde Park and the Domain to reach the Eye Hospital.

I was enjoying my training at the Eye Hospital. I was coping well. My one-year experience in Kenya was a great help. I was ahead of the others in surgery, patient examination, refraction, et cetera. I had to concentrate on the academic side of it.

My supervisor Dr Claffy was very good to me. He was the Senior Surgeon at the Hospital and the first Director of Ophthalmology at the Eye Hospital when it opened in 1964. He was also a part time Professor at Sydney University.

Dr Claffy exempted me from surgical work as I had done more cataracts than some of the junior VMOs. He allowed me time to study for the Diploma and Fellowship Exam. I had to learn Anatomy, Physiology and Optics in detail. I passed the first part of DO Sydney University at the end of the year.

Dev and Veena came to Australia in January 1967. Veena was not quite three. I rented two rooms in a big house owned by a Greek man. The house was a dump. There were fleas and cockroaches everywhere. There were two other families in that house. The landlord used to give eggs and packets of tea/coffee to the tenants every week, probably to keep us there! I think he had a farm nearby where he kept chickens.



**Veena on her horse, aged 2**

Veena's bed was in the second room. She would always wake up in the middle of the night and come and sleep in our bed.

The neighbours next door had a girl the same age as Veena. Her name was Tracey. Tracey used to come and play with Veena. Initially Veena would speak to her in Punjabi and Tracey spoke in English. They seemed to understand each other. In a few weeks Veena realised that her language was not the same

as Tracey's. She totally stopped speaking for about two weeks. I was worried. Surprisingly, she suddenly started speaking in English, in a typical Australian accent. She would often correct my pronunciation of some words! For example, she would say "Dad don't say "cold", say "cauld!" Veena seemed to have settled nicely.

I had to find other accommodation for us as this house was old and pest ridden. We moved in with another Greek family. They had two children, a boy, and a girl. The boy was slightly older than Veena. They got on well. We had one room in the house. The kitchen and bathroom had to be shared. To heat the water, we had to put coins in a meter. Dev managed to keep herself busy looking after Veena and cooking and cleaning.

Claffy very kindly let me do some Refraction Sessions at the Eye Hospital. I used to get 9 Guineas per patient, which was the standard fee. I would see about 7 to 10 patients a session. The money started coming in which I put into a savings account. We were living comfortably. The rent was only \$5. Things were very cheap.

We rented a small TV for Veena. It was black and white only at that time. Veena would get up early and watch cartoons.





Veena's 3rd birthday soon came.

We bought a cake and some toys for her.

She played with the Greek family's children happily.

Pitey was due in November. I was advised by Dr Claffy, and rightly, that I should spend three months at the Royal Eye and Ear Hospital in Melbourne. The Chief Examiner, Dr Ronald Lowe, was a Consultant and Senior Surgeon there. He was a Glaucoma Specialist. Claffy told me that it would be good to work there and they would then come to know me personally. The final exam was in May 1968.

I could not take Veena and Dev to Melbourne. It would be a problem to get proper accommodation because I was offered only one room in the resident's quarter. I certainly could not help Dev and two children while preparing for an exceedingly difficult exam. Veena would probably suffer the worst as Dev would have to spend time looking after Pitey. So, we discussed and

decided that it would be better that Dev and Veena went back to Nairobi and be with the family where they can get the necessary support. Veena will be happy with the grandparents also Sister's family was close by. Dev's family were all in Nairobi.

Looking back at this decision I realised that it was not a good decision. I should have kept them in Australia. The other problem was the Kenya Government had given me only two years to train in Sydney. If I were late, I would lose my job with the government and may have to pay some money back. I was able to extend my stay till May 1968, and the Kenya Government accepted that, as my progress so far had been satisfactory to them. They would not however extend any further.

With a heavy heart I packed off Dev and Veena back to Nairobi early in October 1967. This time was extremely hard for me. I was worried about the family and the exam was hard to pass.

Pitey was born in November 1967, then all hell broke loose! Dev went into severe postpartum depression, which I never imagined would happen. It seems she had no psychological support from anybody including her own family. Beeji and Pitaji were all confused! I did not realise that Dev was not getting on well with them even before she came to Australia. Dev got worse and worse and eventually had to be admitted to hospital.

Meekay wrote to me about Dev's illness. This was the most traumatic time in my life, I cried. I planned to go back to Nairobi. Dr Claffy made enquiries with the Australian Government because they had to buy the air tickets for me. I do not know what went on between Dr Claffy and the authorities. They refused me, saying that they had spent so much money on me, and I should complete my studies.

They however, contacted the Australian High Commissioner in Nairobi and asked him to speak to the Doctor-in-Charge in the hospital and get information about Dev. He probably rang back and said that she was receiving good treatment and she was better now and there was no urgency for me to go back at this stage. It was a very sad and traumatic time for all.



I went to Melbourne in January 1968 and worked in the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital for three months.

**The Eye and Ear Hospital in Melbourne**



Dr Ronald Lowe was impressed with my Ophthalmological knowledge and told me that I had been trained well by the specialist at the Sydney Eye Hospital.

**Hospital Training Group, Melbourne, March 1968.**



The final exam was early February in Sydney. There were six candidates. Dr Lyon Robinson was also one of the candidates. He was repeating the exam as he had failed it at an earlier attempt. He was quite friendly with me. Only three candidates passed the final exam. Myself, Lyon Robinson, and another female doctor from Singapore.

NAME				DEGREES & DIPLOMAS				FACULTY			
MANKU, MEHMA SINGH				D.O.				Medicine			
BORN				ON				(1)			
AGE AT MATRICULATION				ON				(2)			
YRS.				ON				(3)			
MTHS.				MATRICULATION SCHOOL							
GENERAL				L.C. NOV. 19				E. PHYSICS			
M.B., Ch.B. (East Africa)				MAT. FEB. 19				CHEMISTRY			
				A. ENGLISH				GEOLOGY			
				B. MOD. HIST.				GEOGRAPHY			
				ANC. HIST.				PHYSICS-AND-CHEMISTRY			
				ECON.				BOTANY			
				C. LATIN				ZOOLOGY			
				FRENCH				BIOLOGY			
				GERMAN				PHYSIOLOGY			
				D. MATHS. I				AGRIC.			
				MATHS. II				MAT. FROM MARCH 19			
				HON MATHS.				ATT. FROM MARCH 19			
				SCHOOL MATHS.				REATT. FROM MARCH 19			
				BASIC—TH. & PR.							

## Recommendation from Dr. Claffy.

TELEPHONE: ~~REDACTED~~  
357 1495



**The University of Sydney**  
**DEPARTMENT OF OPHTHALMOLOGY AND EYE HEALTH**  
SYDNEY, N.S.W.

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE: PFO:MR

5 Crown Street,  
**POTTS POINT, 2011**

16th May, 1968.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to state that Mr. Gehma Singh Manku was attached as a Registrar to the Sydney Eye Hospital from 27th January, 1966 to 15th May, 1968. During this time he carried out his duties in an exemplary fashion and made the most of the wealth of clinical material which was available to him. He has a very wide knowledge of Ophthalmology and is able to give a very good opinion about any case presented to him.

During his time at the hospital he had the opportunity of special experience in the Retina Clinic and the other special units, glaucoma, uveitis, cornea etc.

He also assisted in the teaching of the Junior Residents and I feel that he should be encouraged to continue with this work. With his experience and knowledge his capabilities as a lecturer are first class.

He was successful in gaining his Diploma in Ophthalmology of the University of Sydney in May, 1967; he was made a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons in May, 1968 by examination.

As a colleague I formed a very high opinion of his character and it was a pleasure to work with him. It would give me great pleasure to recommend him for any Ophthalmic appointment in the future.

The Staff of the Eye Hospital all regret his departure.

Yours sincerely,

F.P. CLAFFY,  
Director of Studies in Ophthalmology  
and Eye Health.



I wanted to get home now! So, I went to the Education Office and asked to be flown back via India. I thought I would see Nanaji and Mamaji and his family on the way back. I wrote to my stepsister in UP and asked them to meet me in Delhi at the hotel I was staying at.

THE AGE, Thursday, March 7, 1968

A Melbourne based Newspaper

## Going home to Kenya as an eye specialist

Dr. Mehman Singh Manku (right), of Kenya, hopes to return home later this year as a member of his country's medical elite.

Dr. Manku, 30, has been in Australia for more than two years on a Commonwealth Plan Fellowship. He has already won a diploma of ophthalmology and hopes to pass the final exam of fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in six weeks.

A Sikh who migrated to Africa with his parents from India, Dr. Manku is on a short study term at the Eye and Ear Hospital.

He is the first Kenyan to study at the hospital.

### Shortage

"We are still very short of our own doctors," he said.

"There is only one medical school for about nine million people—not much less than your population.

"And eye disease is perhaps more prevalent because it is a tropical country."

Dr. Manku said Kenya relied heavily on doctors from overseas and it would be many years before the country could train enough for



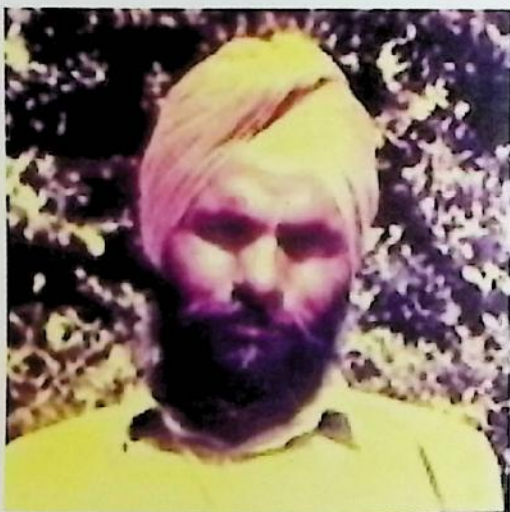
## **CHAPTER 13**

### **India Visit 1968**

My stepsister arrived with her two sons and took me to her relatives in Delhi for a couple of days. They had a cardboard making mill. Her eldest son, Jit Singh, showed me around. I remember him warning me about thieves.

He told me the story of his father who was going to attend a wedding in Delhi by train. He had packed jewellery and nice clothes into a small leather case, which he placed on top of the double bunker. Soon a young fellow came along and spoke nicely with him. They soon got chatting, and Jit's father told him where he was going and that he had brought presents to give to the family. After a while, the young boy stretched, and saying he was tired, asked if he could sleep on the top bunker. Jit's father said yes but kept an eye on his case the entire time. Not realising he had fallen asleep, when he awoke it was with a start but then relaxed when he saw the case still lying there even though the young fellow had disappeared. He climbed up to check the case which he found to be very light, and then realised to his horror that the case had been carefully slit along the edges and all the contents were gone. He had to re-purchase everything.

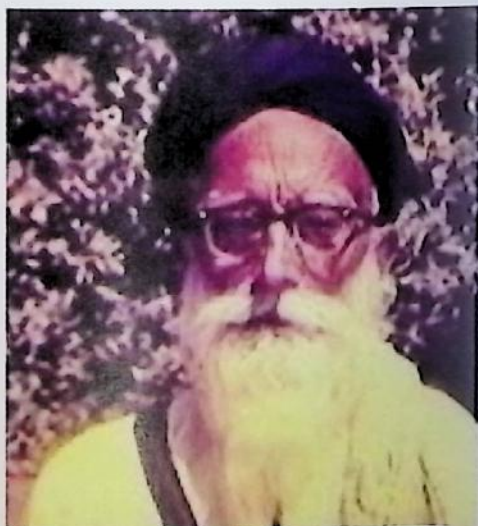
Jit then accompanied me to Punjab by train and bus. I met Nanaji and the family in Saundha. I also met other cousins in Ludhiana. Nanaji was very happy and proud of me! - I think!



**Mamaji**

Nanaji accompanied Jit and me to Ludhiana from Saundha.

We caught a bus from the GT road to Ludhiana. We spent a couple of days in Ludhiana.



**Nanaji**



Jit wanted to take me to his house in Gadarpur in U.P. so that I could meet the rest of my sister's family. The plan was to catch a train to Rampur in U.P, which was the nearest railway station to Gadarpur.

I let Jit plan the trip. I gave him some money for the train tickets. We caught the train from Ludhiana late in the evening. Jit had bought 2 third class tickets. We were able to get 2 seats on the train in Ludhiana and it was not overly full.

The seats in 3rd class (often called 'Gandhi class') were wooden benches, quite hard, and were built to last a long time. There was a row of benches on either side of the carriage facing each other, with an aisle in the middle.

The journey was reasonably comfortable. Nobody tried to steal anything from us. We did not have much except a small cabin size bag with my clothes in it.

It was well past midnight when the train stopped at Saharanpur in U.P. We had to get off that train because we had to catch another train to get to Rampur. Saharanpur is a rail junction. We sat on a bench on the platform waiting for the train to Rampur. It was summertime and the atmospheric temperature was comfortable. It was still dark and the station canteen was not open.

Jit told me that the next train to Rampur would be here in about two hours. That train stopped in Saharanpur for only a few minutes, and we would have to run to board it. It is usually packed with passengers.

We saw a railway porter standing on the platform. Jit called him and said to him that we would give him five rupees if he could put us into a carriage where we could find room for two people to sit. The porter extended his hand for the five rupee note which Jit duly handed over to him because we could hear the train approaching the platform. The train stopped, a few people got out, and an equal number got on. We walked behind the porter who was taking us to a carriage with seating room for us. Suddenly he stopped and directed us to get into the carriage nearby, saying that he would pass my carry bag to us through the window. There were many other passengers trying to get into the same carriage. So, we pushed our way through into the carriage. The man thankfully passed my carry bag to me through the window.

The train moved off the platform and we were left standing looking for a place to sit! All the seats were full. What was the point of giving five rupees to the porter! We could have done equally well or equally badly without his help! I did not say anything to Jit. We looked around, I saw a small space on a

seat where a woman was lying sprawled, sleeping comfortably. There was about a thirty-centimetre gap near her feet. I squeezed myself into that tiny space. Jit also found a similarly small place on another seat.

I was quite uncomfortable, and it was going to be a long journey. I asked the lady who was lying down if she could put her legs to the side a little so that I could sit more easily. In response she closed her eyes and did not budge. There were four other people sitting facing me. I think it was a family travelling together. The lady in the opposite seat said, "Bhai, don't disturb her. She is not well. She has been vomiting all the way and has just settled." So, I felt a lot of empathy for the woman and stayed where I was.

It was still dark outside. The rhythmic "clackety clack" of the train sent me off to sleep for a few minutes and when I opened my eyes and looked at the lady who was lying on the seat. To my utter surprise, she was sitting in the opposite seat and the lady who had asked me to not disturb the sleeping woman, was now sleeping comfortably stretched out. She had covered her face with a towel trying to fool me! There was nothing I could do and had to resign myself to accepting the uncomfortable seat.



Soon enough it was daylight and getting hot. It was summertime. The train stopped at a few stations, and some salesmen got on with their wares to sell, but nobody got off. So, no empty seats!

There was a man at the front of the carriage speaking loudly and telling everybody his life's experiences. There is always a person like this on trains and buses in India. Everybody was kept amused! Free entertainment!

He talked about what happened when he was travelling to Delhi on a train. He said the people in his carriage were totally packed like sardines. Some were sitting, others were standing. It was a stifflingly hot day. The carriage behind was a first-class carriage and there was only one female passenger there. She was the Railway Minister's wife! The air conditioner in her cabin was not working, so from time to time she would put her face out of the window to breathe fresh air.

There was a man in the story-teller's cabin who was trying to get out of his seat and looked quite uncomfortable. He said he had bloody diarrhoea and wanted to use the toilet urgently! Nobody moved to let him through. Suddenly, he felt the urge to empty his bowels. He could not hold it any longer, so he pulled his pants down, put his bum out of the window and let it go full blast! Just at that unfortunate moment the Minister's wife put her face out to

breathe fresh air. She got the full blast in her face!! She was heard cursing.

She called the TT and said, "Do you know who I am??" "Yes, Madam", he said, "You are the Minister's wife." She said, "I have a complaint to make about a passenger in the 3rd class carriage. The man spat betel leaf juice in my face!"

A lot of people in India chew *paan*, or betel leaf, for pleasure. It makes them salivate excessively. A red paste is folded into the leaf along with other ingredients, which is then chewed and spat out onto the roadside. They look like blood stains. One can see the signs of this on the streets of Wembley in the UK, where a lot of Indians live.

The lady did not know that it was something much more sinister than betel juice! To cut the story short, she asked the TT to go to the 3rd class carriage and punish the man who had spat onto her face. The TT said "Lady the carriage is packed. How shall I identify this man? Did you see his face?" She said, "I had a brief look and the man had red lips, and very fat and hairy cheeks!"

True or not, it made everybody laugh!!

There always also are a few conmen on the trains and buses especially those travelling at night time. I was warned against them by one of my friends who had travelled a lot in India.

A common trick is that a man in a nondescript khaki uniform will walk along the aisle with a companion behind him shouting loudly "Brothers and sisters please watch your cash. There are thieves on this train!"

Instinctively, people will reach out and touch the place where they have their money. The old ladies will open their handbags to see if their belongings are still there. These conmen watch carefully and note where each passenger has stored his money! When people doze off during the night, these con artists strike and separate the hard-earned money from the traveller. The country people are especially easy pickings.

Sure enough, on this train these very same people boarded the train in the evening, warning passengers about the presence of thieves. As I had already been warned about these thieves, when the fellow made his announcement, I looked calmly out of the window. The fellow approached me, a foreign looking traveller, and said, "Sir, watch your wallets and check regularly." I smiled, and as he came near me, I pretended to reach for the thief's pocket! He smiled guiltily and walked past me!



The train eventually reached Rampur and we got off. A great relief! I decided to never sit in a third-class cabin again in India! We caught a local bus to Gudarpur which took only half an hour. I met my brother-in-law who was quite old by then. My sister had three daughters and another son who was younger than Jit. Jit was married and had a daughter. I met his wife who was from Punjab.

It was summertime and extremely hot, so we slept on the rooftop of their house. The plan was to spend the night in Gadarpur and then go to Nainital the next day. I had a good sleep as I was very tired from the train journey. I woke up refreshed and asked where the bathroom/toilets were in the house. Surprised looks! Jit came and said, "Pick up that can of water, and we have to go to the field!" So, I went out searching for a suitable place to do the "business".

There were some bushes nearby which would give me some privacy. First bush, somebody was already sitting there! Next bush, another person was sitting. Next few, the same! It seems everybody came out at the same time! I could hear people talking to each other from behind the bushes. Seemed like a social occasion!

I kept on walking further and further from the house. The situation was getting rather desperate. Lots of fibre in the diet (saag etc) was not helping. Eventually, I found a reasonably secluded place to do my business. There was ample evidence and I mean ample evidence on the ground that it was the favourite place for some previous clients! I had reached the point of no return!

*(Lesson to note: "Do not visit relatives where the toilets are open-air fields!")*

Later they told me that one of the neighbours had a pit latrine, but they were reluctant to let other people use it. Now, I already had the experience of pit latrines in Kenya! The alternative was not all that inviting!

The next day we went to Nainital by bus, which is a town at the foot of the Himalayas. Jit's sister's husband accompanied us uninvited. He was waiting for us at the bus stand. He had heard that we were going to Nainital. The route was up steep hills. Halfway, the bus engine started steaming and we had to stop and get out. The engine had overheated, but luckily there was a natural fall of water from the rocky hillside. The driver poured it onto the bonnet and when the engine cooled, we were able to continue our journey.

Nainital is at a higher altitude than Gadarpur, and at an elevation of 2000m it is hence much cooler. High ranking British officers and employees of the British Raj used to spend their summers in Nainital.

### **The Lake**



There was a lake about 4 x 3 km in size surrounded by mountains. The water was crystal clear. We hired a boat and did some rowing. There was a small Gurdwara there at the edge of the lake, but it was closed as there was no Giani working there.

### **Horse riding!**





The bus driver on the right, collecting water to cool the bus engine.



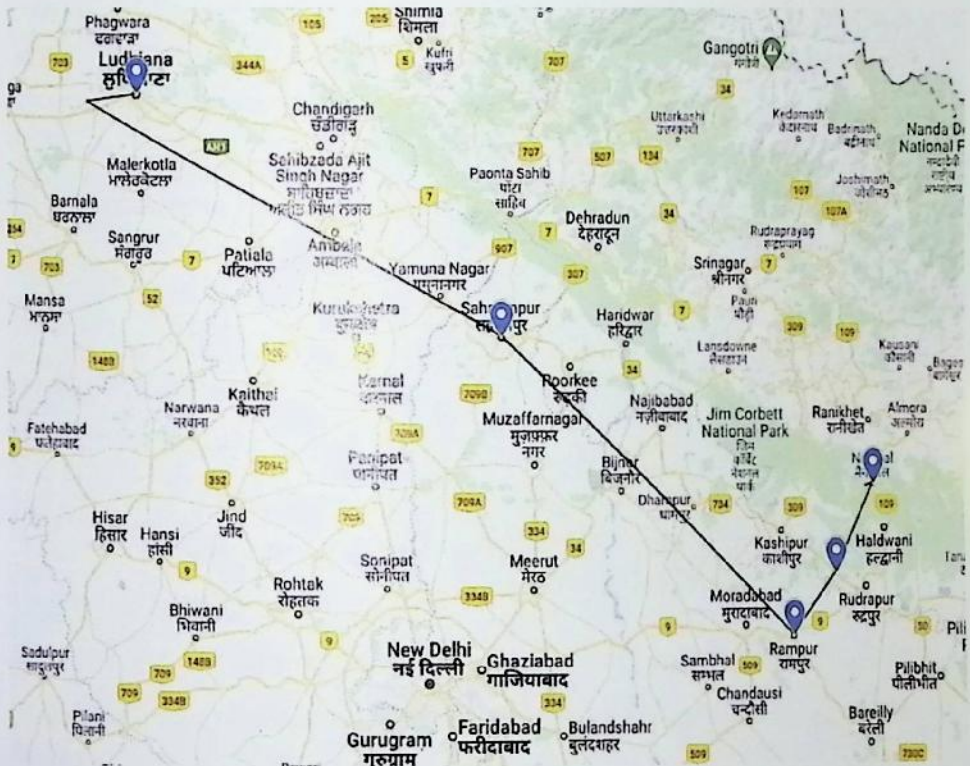
With Jit's brother-in-law



Jit and I



## Our Trip:



Ludhiana - Saharanpur: 220km, 3.5 hours, by train  
 Saharanpur - Rampur: 230km, 7 hours, by train  
 Rampur - Gadarpur: 46 km, 1 hour, by bus  
 Gadarpur - Nainital: 79km, 1.5 hours, by bus

I flew back to Nairobi after one week in India. It was such a relief to see the family. I saw Pitey for the first time. She was six months old and crawling. She smiled every time I talked to her. Veena would not leave my side.



**Relishing mango skins!**

Pitey had short curly hair - we called it spring hair. She looked like a boy. She had a very cheeky smile and was a happy child.

I was quite happy now I was a Specialist Ophthalmologist and back home. I was the only one with a Fellowship in Ophthalmology in East Africa!

**Not bad for a village boy!**



## Back to Kenyatta National Hospital

I went to Kenyatta National Hospital to report to duty the next day. Dr Bisley was still there. He had extended his employment with the government. Dr Awan was also there. I was promoted to Senior Registrar and my salary went up. There was a certain amount of envy from Dr Bisley and Dr Awan, but things moved smoothly.

I met Mr Clifford, the Consultant of Head and Neck in the hospital one day. He was happy to see me and jokingly said, "When are you coming back to my department?" He knew that was never going to happen now. I had my own clinic and operating day in the Eye Department.

I became quite adept in Ophthalmic Surgery and could operate quite fast. Slowly I started getting some private practice. At the back of my mind, I always wanted to go into private practice and make some real money. We were living comfortably on my wages and Dev was not working yet.

I did my first private cataract on a Sikh lady from Tanzania. Her husband was a big businessman in Tanga. I charged 1000 shillings. He was happy and gave me 1100 shillings.

We bought a fridge with my first cataract fee! Before then, we did not have a fridge and bought milk fresh from the farm every morning. The milk was boiled prior to every use. We had a "*mtungi*", which is an earthenware pot to keep water cool.

Meat was eaten only once a week; it was bought fresh and cooked on the same day. We bought either goat or chicken, and the butcher would charge an extra 50c to cut it up for us.

In the evenings at the South C house Beeji would leave some boiled milk to cool by the window. Every night for about a week we could hear a strange noise, but no one could work out where it was coming from.

One morning Beeji was up early and she saw the source of the noise, it was a cat! Despite the vertical bars on the window, the cat managed to get her paw through and was putting it into the milk pot! The sound was coming from the lid clattering against the bars! She moved the pot after that.

So, life was comfortable.

My plan was to become a Consultant at Kenyatta Hospital and then resign to start a private practice. That would allow me to work part time at Kenyatta Hospital

## Mombasa

I went on my first Safari to Mombasa. We had to cover Mombasa from the Nairobi Eye Department as there was no Eye Surgeon in Mombasa.

I had bought a Toyota Corona four door! So, we went to Mombasa as a family for the first time. Pitaji and Beeji were also with us. We stopped on the way at Makindu Gurdwara and had lunch there at the Langar Hall.

There were a lot of flies in the Hall and Pitey saw a fly for the first time! She looked at me and pointed with her finger at the fly and said "*Dudoo*". She was only seven months old. "*Dudoo*" is a Swahili word for any flying or crawling insect. We stayed at the Mombasa Gurdwara. It was school holiday time and there were other Sikh families staying there. People did their own cooking on the veranda. We all had a large room for each family. Veena and Pitey had fun even though they found it rather hot.

I would see patients in the morning at the Government Hospital and in the evening, we used to go to the beach. There was a Gujarati mithai shop nearby which made very nice bhajia. We would buy it and eat it at the beach.





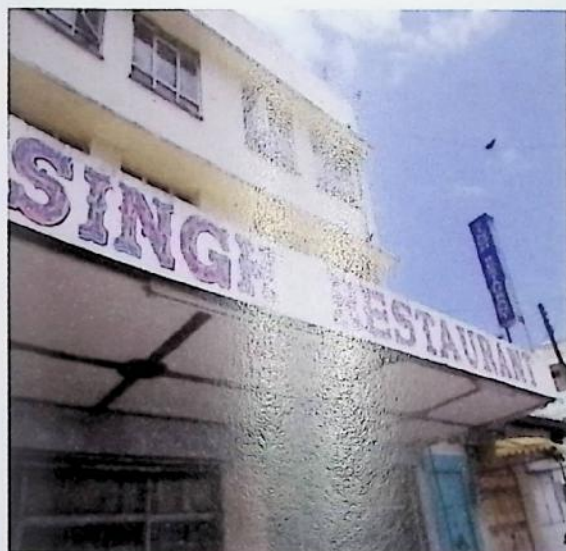
Mombasa is a very old city. It was first settled by the British before they moved inland to Nairobi. It was already a centre for Arab traders who came in dhows and bought and sold goods in Mombasa.



MOI AVENUE-MOMBASA 1956

Mombasa was basically a Muslim city with lots of Arab influence. Mombasa had a good seaport which the British developed for big steam ships.

Some Arab shops in the side streets of Mombasa made nice halwa, which everybody bought. They sold this halwa in small baskets made of banana leaves.



Next to the Gurdwara was an Indian restaurant called Singh Restaurant. Families that stayed at the Gurdwara often ate there in the evening. Mr Singh made his chicken curry which Veena and Pitey enjoyed also.



Nearby was a "Chor market", literally meaning "market of thieves". One could buy cheap trinkets and clothes there.

They said most of the objects were stolen and sold there.

There were lots of pickpockets in Mombasa town and one had to be very careful. Fortunately, there was no violence at the time.

For two days I went to Malindi to see patients, and I also took the family there. It was a small coastal town populated with tourists, about 120km south of Mombasa.

I also had to do other "Eye Safaris" in Kenya to places like Nanyuki, Embu, Karatina et cetera. These towns were at the foot of Mount Kenya. It would get quite cold at night.

I would do about 30 cataracts and other operations every day and move onto the next centre. The post-operative check was done by local hospital dressers (nursing aides) whom we had trained.



## U.K. Visit

I went to the UK for the first time in July 1969 to attend the Oxford Eye Conference. Bans came to Gatwick Airport to collect me. The airfare was 700 shillings (£35). It was a discount airfare as the people who chartered the aeroplane were my friends, Didar Singh Manku and Suresh Sofat. (Didar Singh was not related to us).

When the original Manku Clans dispersed, they went to different parts of India. Didar Singh's family was from the Jalandhar area. These two used to work for Alitalia. They committed some fraud on air tickets and were jailed for three months. Didar Singh used to drink a lot before. In jail he did Ardaas for early release and vowed to take Amrit and stop drinking and eating meat. He prayed to Sant Puran Singh of Kericho also, I think.

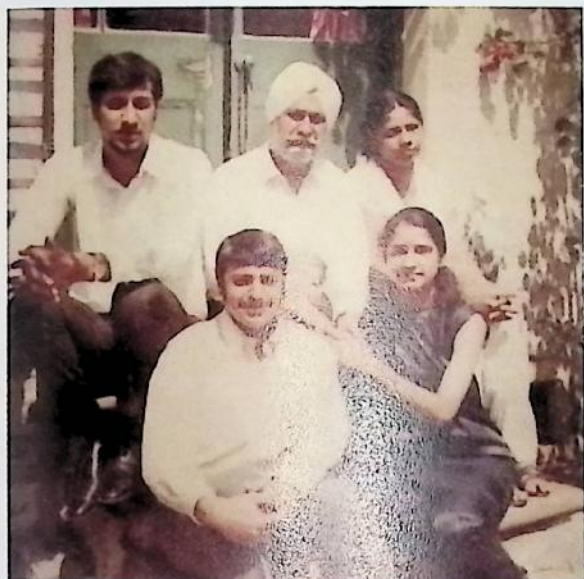
When they were released from prison, they started their air charter business. They had an office in Oxford Street. Didar Manku kept his vow and took Amrit and became a Sewak of Sant Puran Singhji. He helped to establish the Soho Road Gurdwara in Birmingham. Both these gentlemen became my friends. Suresh Sofat's brother, Subhash Sofat, was a doctor qualified in India. He became my friend too because he knew Dr Gulshan Gupta who was my friend from Kenyatta Hospital. Subhash Sofat runs a nursing home in London now. The travel business

became "Somak Travel", as Didar Manku sold his share to Suresh, but they combined their surnames to come up with the final business name. The business is now run by Suresh and his sons and is based in London.

When Bans collected me from the airport, we went to his accommodation. He had rented a room from an old lady. She was strict and did not allow tenants to bring guests to stay overnight. We were very quiet, but she found out that Bans had a guest, so she gave him an instant quit notice! I bet Bans had brought in people before and must have been warned by the lady. I did not ask him about them.

So, we went to my Uncle's place in Leytonstone. I stayed there for the rest of my three-week stay. They were good to me. We knew the family from before. Deesho and Malkit, his sons, had stayed with us in Nairobi. The whole family had stayed with us in Nairobi when I was in Australia.

Leytonstone is on the Central line and was really convenient for me. So, every time I visited, I stayed there. They always looked after me well. Our 'Chachi', Deesho's mother, was a very nice lady and a good cook. They gave me a key to the house so that I could come in late if I wanted to.



**Bans with Deesho.  
Deesho's father,  
mother and sister**

**Outside my Uncle's House**



During my first visit to the UK, I also met my school classmates who were studying in the UK. They lived in an area called Earls Court. Evidently, a lot of time was spent drinking et cetera and they took ages to pass their degrees - they were being supported by their parents in Kenya.



I used to go to the UK almost every year in the summertime. The weather was good and days were long. Kenya being on the equator, the days are of same length throughout the year. I was surprised to see the sun set at 10pm in England. Dev stayed in Kenya with the children because of their schooling. She never complained about me going to the U.K. by myself.

I always attended the Oxford Ophthalmological Society Meetings while in the U.K. Top Ophthalmologists in the U.K. attended this meeting to present their research papers. This helped me to keep my academic knowledge up to date. It also helped me to develop good relations with the senior Ophthalmologists in the U.K. I also used to meet the Indian Ophthalmologists and learn about the difficulties they were facing in their jobs in the N.H.S.

I also kept my knowledge up to date by attending sessions at Moorfields Hospital. I became a member of the Oxford Society at the recommendation of Sir Patrick Trevor Roper, who was the Queen's Ophthalmologist. I met him as he used to visit Kenya from time to time and do operating sessions with us.

Mr Rolf Black, a Senior Retinal Surgeon at Moorfields Hospital became a good friend of mine. He invited me to his house, and we saw the first moon landing on his television on that day.

Mr Black later became the Dean of the Institute of Ophthalmology in London.

I mostly stayed with my uncle's family in Leytonstone, but also often went to Birmingham to stay with my cousin Sham Singh. They used to live near us in Nairobi in Eastleigh. The family always welcomed me to their home in Sparkhill.

Dev's sister Deesh and family were also in Birmingham. I also visited them regularly. Deesh and her husband Harbans owned a Post Office and were always happy to see me. Deesh is a good cook.



**Me, Dev, Deesh, Surjit, Bans, Sham Singh, and Harbans.**

My sister and her husband Santokh Singh and family migrated to the U.K. in April 1975. They bought a house in Sparkhill, Birmingham. I stayed with them on my subsequent visits to the U.K.

Bans and his wife Surjit (they got married in 1971), bought a house in Uckfield initially then later sold that house and moved to Crawley. I also used to spend some time with them while in London. Meekay was studying Dentistry at London University. He often visited Bans and family during his holidays.



**Sham Singh,  
Meekay, and  
Bans.**



Just before I had arrived back in Kenya from Australia, Meekay had done his HSC at the Nairobi Technical College. He had to go to the UK for further studies as there was no opportunity in Nairobi. Bans had already gone to the UK and was studying there doing an Engineering degree. I had been supporting them from Australia and sent money from my scholarship off and on. He also held part time jobs to finish his degree.

It was not easy to get a visa to go to the UK at that time. The British Government had placed restrictions on Indians from Kenya to go and settle or study in the UK. Somebody advised me that I should tell the British High Commission in Nairobi that I could no longer support my brother in Kenya and since he had a British passport, he had to go to the UK. We arranged to get Meekay admitted to Norwood Technical College to study for the A levels there. We sent all the paperwork to The British High Commission in Nairobi. They called Meekay for an interview and I was allowed to go with him.

The person interviewing us was an ex- British Army officer. He initially was quite belligerent and said he did not believe that Meekay was going for further education. I told him to look at the admission papers for the UK college. He said, "My education was interrupted during the war and I could not study further!" I replied, "Why should this boy suffer now?" He was taken aback

and looked embarrassed. Then he agreed to investigate the application again. He even said that the College which had offered admission to Meekay was being investigated to ascertain if it was genuine!

We had no hope when we came home. Luckily in a few days we received a letter that Meekay's study visa was approved!

We were all happy. Meekay soon left for the UK. There he applied for Medicine and Dentistry in the Universities as he had already passed the Cambridge School Certificate in Nairobi. He was offered a place in Medicine in Ireland which Meekay refused to accept. I think he had just left home for the first time and was quite lonely in the UK even though Bans was there.

Meekay fortunately got admission into Dentistry in London University which he accepted and started doing Dentistry. He was not considered a UK resident and could not apply for an education grant, so I supported him throughout his course. I opened an account with a Bank which was near Meekay's college. He could withdraw money from there and pay for his fees and other expenses.

Bans finished his degree and had a job with a British arms manufacturing company as a Systems Engineer. So, he was

independent now. Meekay would spend some weekends with him. Meekay used to work during the long holidays, evidently it was not hard to get part time jobs. His first job was a cook's assistant in the kitchen of one of the big stores - ?Harrods? The chief cook was a huge West Indian gentleman. He always wore a large overcoat during the wintertime. He would often sneak out a chicken in his big coat from the kitchen and take it home - one frozen chicken under each armpit. I am not sure if he offered one to Meekay!



## Consultant Position at Kenyatta Hospital

In 1970, the Kenyan Government put a lot of money into Kenyatta Hospital. They created more Consultant positions. Both Dr Awan, my Senior Associate and myself applied for the Consultant position in the Eye Department.

We were called for an interview at the headquarters in Nairobi city. We both went for the interview at the appropriate time. We were told by the Medical Director's secretary, an old English lady, that there was a mistake and there were no interviews today and no new Consultant positions! We were very disappointed. Later we discovered that Dr Bisley had been there and convinced the authorities that there was no need to have more Eye Consultants. He had renewed the extension of his appointment to the Kenyatta Eye Department.

We went to the Medical Superintendent who was an African who had already replaced an Englishman who had been in that job for years. He was surprised that we were not interviewed. He rang the Director who was now an African doctor by the name of Dr. Leekimani and told him what had happened. So, we were called back again for an interview after a few weeks. Bisley had gone on holiday. We were both appointed Consultants to the Eye Department. This surprised Dr Bisley when he came back.

## Corner House Practice

Dr Sandhu was an Eye Surgeon in Nairobi. He had a practice in Corner House (equivalent to Harley Street in London).



Corner House was a building in the centre of Nairobi where professionals had their offices.

There was an Optician, a Chemist, a Gynaecologist and a Radiologist.

**Corner House,  
Nairobi**

Dr. Sandhu had been practising for quite a few years and had a good Asian and European patient practice. He decided to retire as he had made enough money over the years. His children were grown up and he wanted to retire and live in Chandigarh in India, where he had already bought a house.

Dr Sandhu knew about me through some patients. So, he rang me to ask if I wanted to buy his practice. I was definitely interested. That was my aim, anyway. I had been a Consultant in the Government and could not go any higher. I did not want to wait for the old age government pension.

Dr Sandhu invited me to dinner at the only Chinese restaurant in Nairobi. He encouraged me to buy his practice and said I would make money there. I would not have to wait for a government pension as I could earn enough not only for my pension but also for my children and my grandchildren's pension! He was earning about 8,000 to 10,000 shillings a month. I was currently getting about 1,200 a month. This would be 10 times more and I was very tempted!

Pitaji was against it. He said this man was trying to trap me. Pitaji had never seen that kind of money in his life. That was his natural reaction. I felt Dr Sandhu could be exaggerating his earnings. My father-in-law, Dev's father, was retired in Ludhiana by now. He wrote to me advising that I should not leave my permanent and pensionable government job as it was secure. I, however, had already made up my mind. I was of course very apprehensive.



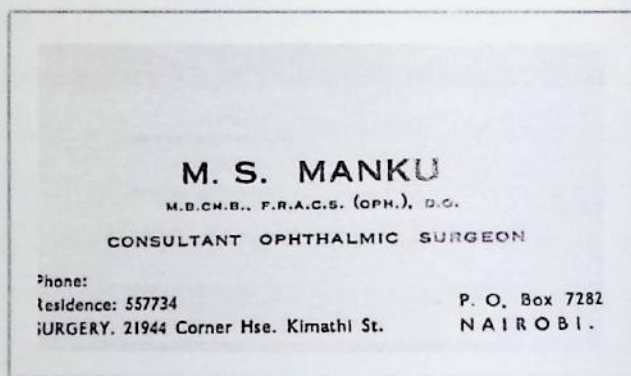
Dr Sandhu wanted 40,000 shillings as goodwill. (about £1000). I did not have that kind of money. So, we agreed that I should pay within six months. He, unlike me, was quite confident that I would be able to pay that amount easily. We signed an agreement. His lawyer drew up the documents and had them duly and legally stamped.

I thought Dr Sandhu would stay and work with me for about three months to introduce me to his patients. At first, he agreed, but when the papers were signed, he said "Sorry, I have to leave in December 1970." I had to take over in January 1971! His wife was his secretary, and she would also go. He had a very good African assistant who stayed with me, his name was Mwangi. Mwangi was a Kikuyu. He could speak broken English and was entirely honest. Dr Sandhu had told me that I could rely on Mwangi and trust him with any amount of money. He was right. Mwangi proved to be very loyal and honest. Dr Sandhu paid him 600 Kenya shillings (£30) per month. Mwangi opened and locked the surgery at the end of the day and kept it clean. He knew the eye instruments that were used in the surgery.

I employed an Indian girl as a secretary. By this time, we were allowed to employ only Kenyan citizens. It was hard to get educated Indian girls who were Kenyan citizens.

Dr Sandhu left and gave me the key to his surgery in December 1970. I started working in January 1971 with great trepidation and apprehension. Was it a risk? I had the whole family dependent on me, two kids and a third on the way. Meekay was still studying in the UK.

Fortunately, with Guruji's Blessings, all went well.



My first month's income was 20,000 Kenyan shillings, much more than Dr Sandhu used to earn. I had not yet resigned from the government job. I used to go early to the Hospital, see the patients and rush back to the surgery to see my private patients. I was still getting full government pay.

I think soon people knew that I was in private practice. The Hospital Superintendent rang me and was angry that I was not working fully in my hospital job. I just resigned. I did not need the government job now! I wanted to do some sessions at the

Kenyatta Hospital, but I think Dr Bisley blocked that, however I am not sure about this. I still went to teach students as the University Professor wanted this to continue. This was unpaid, of course!

Dr Sandhu was also a consultant at the Aga Khan Hospital, the main private hospital in Nairobi. He resigned when he retired, and the job was then advertised. Dr Awan, who was senior to me, wanted that job.

One could work full time at Kenyatta Hospital and hold a consultant practice at the Aga Khan. The other European consultants were doing that. I also applied and really needed that position for private patients.

Bisley told me he had been approached by the Chairman of the Appointment Committee about this appointment. He said he had told them that "if they wanted a Consultant with wide knowledge, then Dr Manku is the one; if they wanted a good general Ophthalmologist, then Dr Awan was also good." A mixed and vague statement.

I went for the interview and found that Dr Neville, my old consultant at Kenyatta Hospital under whom I had done my surgical internship, was on the committee. When it came to him to ask me a question, he said, "Dr Manku is my protege, I have



no questions for him.” Dr Harris, under whom I had done my Medical internship, was the Chairman of the Interviewing Committee. Anyway, I was duly appointed. The youngest consultant at the Aga Khan Hospital! Dr Awan was very disappointed. He was so much well known and senior to me and expected to get that appointment.

I still wanted a part time job at Kenyatta to do difficult public patients. They refused to appoint me.

Soon the Surgical Professor at the University had changed and a Dr Bal, an Indian who was trained in the UK was appointed. I met him a few times and he liked me. He was a Punjabi-Hindu married to a Muslim girl. He later moved to Canberra. I talked to him about the appointment at Kenyatta Hospital. I was already attached to Nairobi University as an Honorary Lecturer in Ophthalmology. He campaigned for me and got me a part time position at Kenyatta Hospital. I think Dr Bisley was on leave then and everything was working fine now.

## Our House in South C

I had already seen a few houses for sale. I desperately wanted to move out of the rented flat in Eastleigh. It was not a great area to live. I wanted the children to go to good schools. I selected the South C area in Nairobi. It was a relatively new development. There were lots of well to do Indian families living there, and the majority were Sikhs.

The other advantage was the local Gurdwara was five minutes walking distance away. Very convenient for the parents especially Beeji, as she liked to go to the Gurdwara. The Gurdwara in South C was walking distance from our house and Beeji often went there to participate in ladies Sat Sang (Kirtan). She could play simple tunes on the harmonium. Pitaji could easily get into town for his shopping. He often went by bus. Pitaji always kept himself busy shopping and doing odd repairs in the South C House. He also helped Beeji in looking after the children while Dev and myself were at work.

We had an African servant who did the cleaning and washing et cetera. Another African servant, Anna helped looking after the children. The house had a secure backyard where the children played and entertained themselves in a safe environment.

Veena and Pitey were born while we were still in Eastleigh. Kiran and Mandy were born after we had moved to the South C house.

We bought a three-bedroom house in South C. It had a big yard at the back, a garage, and servants' quarters. Pitaji single-handedly constructed a one bedroom flat with its own bathroom within the servant's quarters, cleaned the yard and put in pavers. The yard was totally enclosed all around. This was very safe for the kids to play or ride their bikes. He also put up a swing for the children in the car port. (Later after we moved to Australia, they rented this room out to a Sikh family. They provided good company for Beeji and Pitaji in our absence. After Beeji and Pitaji sold the house, the new owners converted the quarters to a double storey extension.)

We moved in in January 1971. Bans was on holiday in Kenya and looking for a bride. He helped to shift to the new house. The house cost about 90,000 Kenyan shillings and I borrowed money from the Building Society.

Kiran was born in May 1971 at the Aga Khan Hospital, delivered by Dr Mrs Ramrakha who had delivered Pitey as well. This doctor's husband was an anaesthetist and used to work with me. Kiran was a small baby compared to the other girls. She grew fast and started talking by the time she was two years old. One



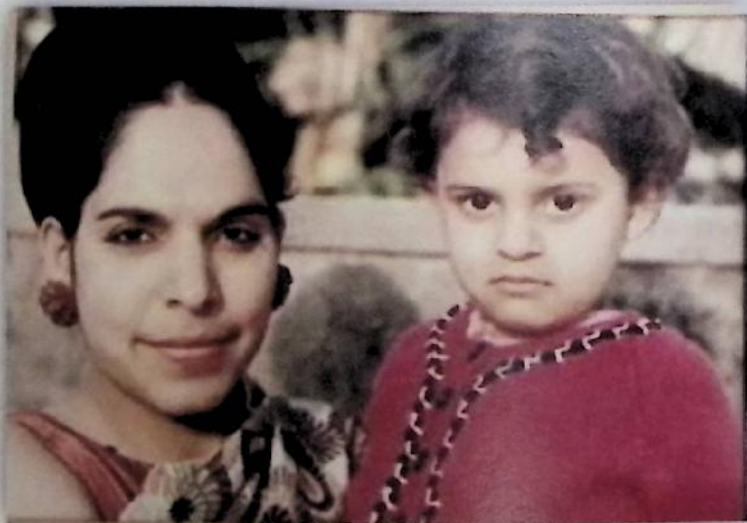
could have a full conversation with her by the time she was three. She used to participate in the conversation when Beeji's friends visited our house.

I had fixed a bolt high up on the front door so that the children could not open it. One day, Kiran and Beeji were home by themselves when some of the Beeji's friends came and knocked on the front door. Beeji was in the kitchen and could not hear them knocking. Kiran heard them went to the door and shouted through the door and asked them to wait while she opened the front door. She of course could not reach the bolt at the top of the door. No problem. She dragged a chair near the door and opened the front door. Beeji's friends were surprised and shocked to see that little Kiran had opened the door. Kiran asked the ladies to wait in the lounge and went to call Beeji.

My safety device was not Kiran-proof! One day Kiran and Dev were home alone. Dev went into the vaera and Kiran locked her out. Kiran needed some coaxing to open the door and let Dev in! It is still a mystery why she locked her mum out!



**Kiran in the vaera**



**Dev and Pitey**

We got admission for Kiran to a preschool in South C. She mostly went happily. I remember one day when she refused to go and started crying. Dev was also working by then and Kiran had to go to school. After some firm words from me she agreed, as long as she was taken to the school in her "Cemedes car" (Mercedes, which I had bought that year.) So, she went in the Cermedes car!



**Cermedes car, in the gated drive**



## Private Specialist Practice

1971 was a great year for me. I started private practice, bought a house, and became a Consultant and of course Kiran was born! The practice went extremely well by the Grace of God. I also had a part time appointment at Kenyatta National Hospital and was an Honorary Lecturer in Ophthalmology at the University of Nairobi.

There was a Mr Phillip Morris, an Englishman in private practice in Nairobi, who resented me a little. I had asked him to do clinics at Kenyatta Hospital. He used to just come and operate and never see the patients before or after the surgery. I felt that was unfair for the patients. He was my main competition in private practice. He had most of the European practice in Nairobi. As God willed, he was driving back from Mombasa with the family and had a car accident. Unfortunately, he died on the spot. All his practice fell into my lap and I became quite busy.

I started getting the elite white practice. All the Ambassadors from various countries were my patients. The American Embassy was quite large in Nairobi. I had a lot of patients from them. Not only that, but there was also the American Peace Corps movement at that time, when young Americans were sent overseas to work in developing countries as teachers, engineers,

et cetera. If anything happened to their eyes, they were flown to my practice in Nairobi.

Colonel Waruru was the Chief Army officer in Kenya. He was three years junior to me at Makerere, so I knew him in Kampala. He was my patient and through him I started getting people from the Armed Forces as patients. I also treated all the members of the Kenya Air Force. I also had the opportunity of treating one of Mr Kenyatta's children who was brought to my surgery by Mama Ngina Kenyatta, the wife of the president. Mr Arap Moi was the Vice President of Kenya and later became the President. He used to bring his daughter, Susan Moi, for eye treatment. Mr Moi was a thorough gentleman, he always offered to pay for the visit, which I refused.

I also treated Mr Charles Njonjo, who was the Attorney General of Kenya, a very powerful position in the government. I treated most of the high Government officials. I had known them at Makerere College when I was a student there. The practice was raving success.

Some other important people I treated were Mr Kariuki, a Kikuyu politician who died in mysterious circumstances. He was a nice man. I also treated the Aga Khan's brother who was visiting his



large Ismaili community in Africa. I also met the Aga Khan and his wife when they visited the Aga Khan Hospital in Nairobi.

Rich Indian people used to fly to Nairobi to see me. I had patients from Tanzania, Uganda, and Aden, where rich Arabs would come from for eye treatment. I also treated Dr Leakey, the famous archaeologist, and his family on a few occasions.

The Muslim Religion Leader, the Mufti of Kenya, came from Mombasa for eye treatment. He came to see me at the advice of the Governor of the Bank of Kenya, Mr Abdalla, who was in Northcote Hall in Makerere when I was the Chairman. Representatives of foreign embassies were all my patients. I had a regular operating session at the Nairobi Hospital which was the only European hospital in Kenya. It was opened to other races after Independence.

One day I was seeing patients in the surgery when an old African man, who was a patient I had previously treated for a severe eye infection, came in. He laid a bundle at my feet and said that he was grateful for the treatment I had given him and would I please accept the gift from him. I looked at a neatly wrapped bundle in newspaper. To my horror, the bundle started moving! He said this is a "*kukur*" (chicken). I brought the chook home, and it became the family pet for a while. When Veena and Pitey came



from school the first thing they did was run out in the yard and feed the chook. He soon grew quite big. The children were not told, but the chook ended up in a cooking pot eventually. So sad! Veena asked Pitaji, "Where is the kukur?" He glibly replied, "He flew away". She asked "Why did you not catch him?" - No answer!

African country people are very generous, and they would always bring small gifts like corn cobs, sticks of sugar cane et cetera. I always charged a reduced fee to the country African patients. I also had a special reduced fee for the Sikh families. I felt I owed the community.

Groups of Ophthalmologists used to visit us from the USA, and I used to present interesting eye problems in the meetings. The American surgeons were impressed with me and one of the Senior Surgeons recommended me to become a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, which I accepted. It was another FACS degree for me! I later also became a Fellow of the International College of Surgeons, and a member of the American Academy of Ophthalmology.

It was difficult to get eye transplant material in Nairobi, so I spoke to Mr Rajni Patel who was the Chairman of the Lions Club in Nairobi. As I was also a member, we both approached the Lions

Club of Colombo and they arranged to send the donor eyes with B.O.A.C. It was a successful transplant!! Mr Patel was a very wealthy businessman. He owned the Woolworths store in Nairobi.



**A PAIR of eyes for corneal transplant presented to the Lions' Eye Foundation of Kenya by the Lions Club of Colombo, Ceylon, were flown by BOAC from Colombo to Nairobi on Thursday. Two officers of the foundation, Mr. M. S. Manku and Mr. Rajni Patel, are pictured at Nairobi Airport receiving the parcel from the BOAC captain. Mr. Manku successfully performed the corneal transplant yesterday at the Aga Khan Hospital, Nairobi.**

**DAILY NAT. Saturday, April 8, 1972**

Rajni Patel and I receiving donor eyes for the very first corneal transplant ever performed at the Aga Khan Hospital, Nairobi.

I was doing quite well professionally and socially in Nairobi. We were well off. This life was comfortable, and we had an African house servant to help with the household duties, as was the custom in those days.

Sant Baba Puran Singhji of Kericho also came to see me for an eye check-up. He blessed me with a pat on my back.

The wife of my friend (Mohan Singh Flora, whom I knew from school in Nakuru and now lives in the U.K), was from the Kisumu area and is related to Baba Puran Singhji. Babaji had also attended Baba Isher Singhji's KURSI sessions in Nakuru when we were there.

Sant Baba Puran Singhji set up the Soho Road Gurdwara in Birmingham. The Head there now is Mohinder Singh.

Baba Puran Singh was a highly spiritual man. He meditated from early childhood. His name is well known in Kenya. Baba Ji lived in Kericho (Kenya). He worked as a builder.

Baba Puran Singh was a true Sikh and strictly practiced the three principals of Sikhism.



**1. Kirt karo.**

*Earn your living by honest means, it may be a job or business.*

**2. Vand shako.**

*After taking out enough money for your family needs, the rest should be shared with the needy, provide food to the hungry and clothes to the needy.*

**3. Naam japo.**

*Meditate on the "Naam" bestowed to us by Guru Nanak.*

By following these principles Baba Ji had reached a very high stage of spirituality. It is well known to the Sikhs in Kenya that miracles happened around him.

Once he was driving home when there was a big storm. A tree had fallen across the road blocking the way. Baba Ji was driving and meditating. He did not want to stop the car as it would cause a break in his spiritual concentration. He wished that the tree would move out of the way. It is said that the tree lifted out of the way and he was able to drive through.

Such happenings are unbelievable to an average person but for the spiritually elevated person such miracles are not uncommon. I was so happy when he blessed me with a tap on my back.

## Family Life in Nairobi

Veena and Pitey attended Westlands Primary school in Nairobi. I had to use considerable influence to get them admitted. It was the best school in Nairobi at that time. They both did well there and made new friends. I asked Dev to stop teaching and concentrate on looking after the children at home. She was a great teacher and Veena and Pitey did well at school because of her efforts. Dev was one of the best teachers at the Khalsa School. Her students used to pass the Kenya Preliminary exam easily. Some of her students still meet her even now and they express their appreciation to her.



**Westlands Primary**



I worked hard during the week, including a half Saturday. The rest of the time was for family.

I would take the children out almost every weekend for ice cream in the city and shopping. They used to love the bookshop. I also took them for picnics at the Lions Club. Dev and I would take them to the drive-in movies. They would watch the opening cartoons and eat hot chips.

As soon as this was over, there was a clamour to go home! Kiran would fall asleep on Mum's lap. Pitey once waited patiently even after the cartoon was over, and then cautiously asked, "Are we enjoying?"

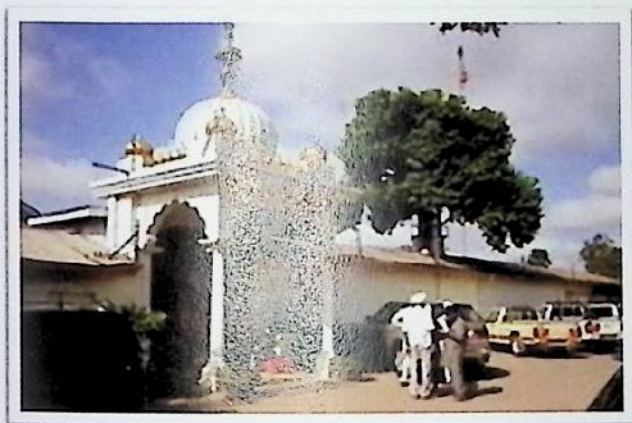


**Diwali fulcharia  
in the front  
verandah**

During the school holidays Ravi, Bhainji's daughter, used to come over and play with the girls. The family also visited us during festivals like Diwali.



We often used to drive to Makindu Gurdwara to matha-take and have Langar there. Saturday evenings we often went to listen to Kirtan at the Railway Landhies Gurdwara and the South C Gurdwara nearby (established in 1973).



**Railway Landies  
Gurdwara**

The Railway Landies Gurdwara was built in the area given to the Sikhs by the British to have their quarters, and a Gurdwara was built there in 1903. There were always also social functions to attend over the weekends. Lion's Club parties, weddings, et cetera.

**South C  
Gurdwara  
Darbar Hall**





I took the family to the Nairobi National Park quite a few times.

There was a nice restaurant there where the children always wanted to have hot chips. The

children really enjoyed looking at the animals roaming in their large enclosures.

Indian sweets were always available at home. I remember Veena telling Beeji that she would rather eat a barfi rather than a banana as a banana had to be peeled and that took time!

Pitey was never fond of sweets when she was young. One day we went to the Indian restaurant in Ngara. The children wanted to eat gulab jaman so I took them to the Durga hotel in Ngara. The first gulab jaman Veena opened had a fly embedded in the middle! No more sweets from that restaurant ever! No more mithai for a while!

Kiran always wanted a full share of whatever we were eating even though she ate very little and was very skinny. In Gurdwara

Langar, she would demand her own thali for food and expected to be served every time somebody came round to offer more sabji and roti!

One day we went to the ice cream shop and Veena and Pitey had two scoops of ice cream in a cone. I bought Kiran a cone with only one scoop and Kiran started crying loudly and wanted two scoops like Pitey and Veena. So, I went back to the shop and bought an ice cream cone with two scoops and gave it to Kiran to stop her from crying. Immediately there was a big smile on her face and she proudly waved around the ice cream cone to show Veena and Pitey that she had the same amount of ice cream as they had, and lo and behold the whole ice cream fell to the ground. More tears!

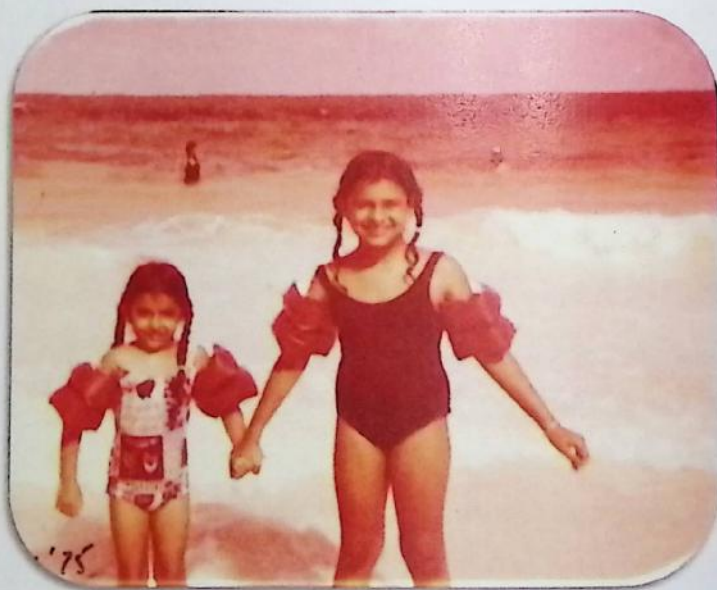
We went on holiday to Mombasa. The Hotel Manager was showing different rooms to us. Dev and I were in front followed by Veena, Pitey and Kiran. Suddenly I turned back and found Kiran nowhere to be seen! I panicked as I thought she had been abducted while our attention was diverted. We ran around the motel shouting for her. To my great relief we found her sitting at the edge of the swimming pool!

It reminded me of when I was left behind in an unknown town while in a wedding party. Luckily, my older cousin noticed me



standing alone and picked me up otherwise I would have been lost. Bans was lost in Ludhiana in a similar situation when we were shopping in Ludhiana before coming to Kenya. He was the last in the group and quietly walked away. It was panic stations! Luckily Pitaji found him walking several meters away in the opposite direction.

Lesson for this: NEVER take your eyes off your children when shopping or holidays or any other time! I haven't lost any child since then!



**Mombasa's white sand beaches.  
Kiran and Pitey. Veena and myself in the background**

## Ready for a road trip!

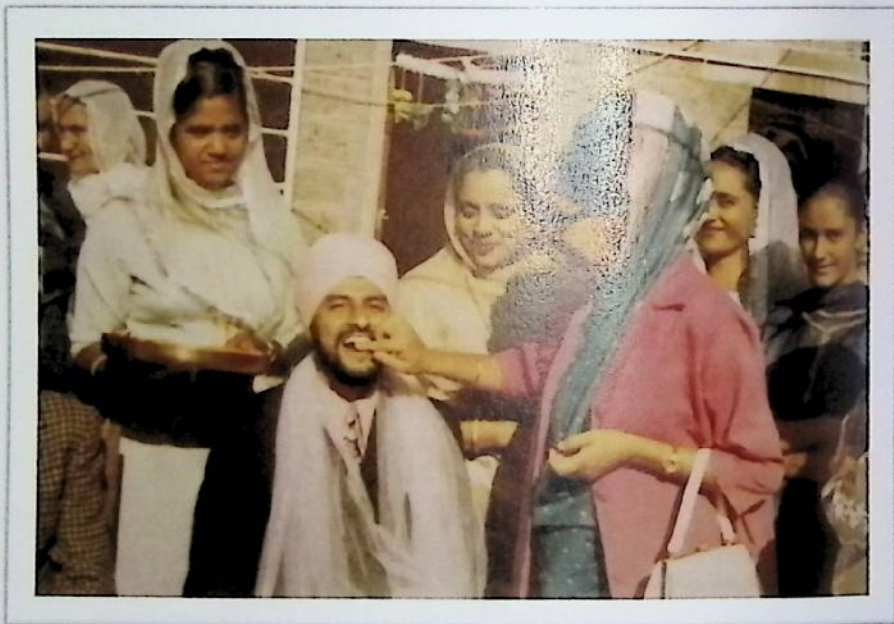


The children always looked forward to going to the Nairobi Agricultural Show which was held annually just outside Nairobi. They always wanted to eat Uplands Bacon Factory's hotdogs before doing anything else!

This show was called the Royal Agricultural Show before Independence and was initially held in Nakuru, which was the headquarters of the White Highlands. It was a highly fertile area and later became the focus of the Mau Mau rebellion. When I was still at school, I used to go there as a scout to help in the

First Aid Post. The scouts were invited free of charge to the show. We helped people around.

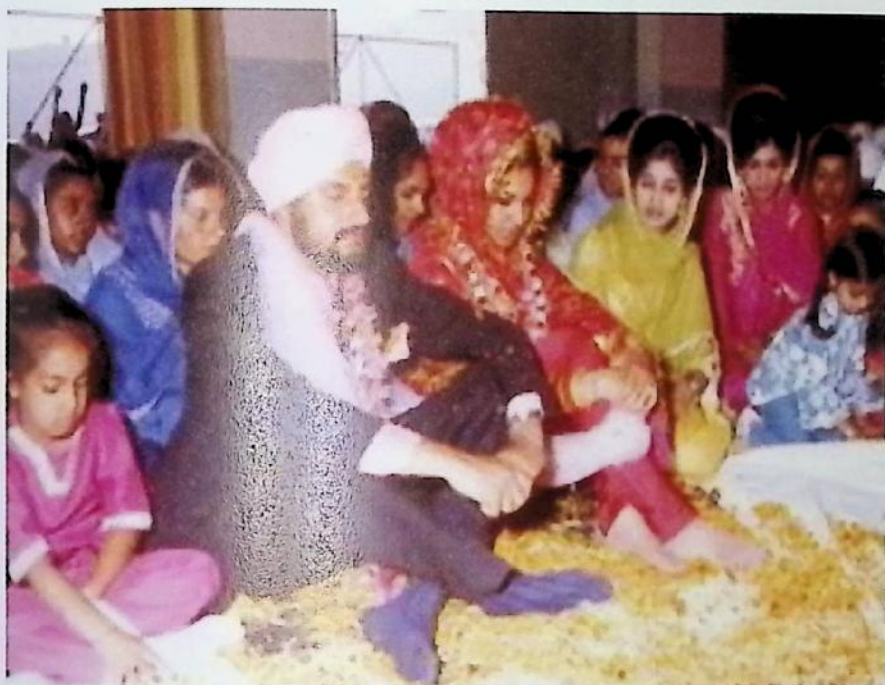
Bans was married in 1971. Surjit, his wife, was from a Panesar family. We had known the family for years and were good friends.



**Dev giving Bans sagan in the vaera.**



### Wedding at Juja Rd Gurdwara.



Amrik had finished his degree in Dentistry and came home in the year ?1974. He got a job as a lecturer in Nairobi University in the Dental School. I had to use influence as he was a British Citizen and not eligible for a position in the University.

Pitaji and Beeji had worked hard all their life and I felt they deserved a change and a holiday so I arranged to send them to the UK so they could visit family. They stayed with Bans and Surjit in Crawley and spent time with my cousin's family in Birmingham.

## Political Upheaval

Even in those days house break-ins and thefts were common in Nairobi. There was fortunately no violence involved. We had bars on all windows and a steel gate erected in the front yard.

One day about 9.00pm we were all watching TV in the lounge room. Kiran was only a few months old and was sleeping in her cot in the bedroom. Dev heard a noise. She thought Kiran had woken up, so she went to check on her. She was shocked to see that Kiran was sleeping quietly but an African was pulling a bedsheet through the window bars! Evidently, he had broken a stem from the rosebush which was growing outside and used the thorns on the stem to entangle the bedsheet and was pulling it out. She quickly held the sheet on the other end and pulled it back inside. There was a tug-of-war for a few seconds, which eventually Dev won and saved the bedsheet! The thief got frightened, ran away and disappeared into the night! The incident was very unsettling.

There was a revolution in Uganda in 1972 when Idi Amin grabbed power in Uganda while the legitimately elected President, Mr. Obote, was on a State Visit to Singapore/Malaysia. Mr Obote had leftist ideas.

That did not suit the Conservative Government in Britain. I think Amin was encouraged by the British government to take overpower in Uganda. Unfortunately, for the British, he turned anti-British. He asked all the British citizens, white and brown, to leave Uganda or suffer consequences! Many Asians were British Subjects and had lived in Uganda for generations and consolidated the economy of Uganda. Asians held important government positions. The English professors who had done a great job in teaching the Africans at Makerere University were also asked to leave. The Uganda economy was in chaos.

The political upheaval in Uganda shook people's confidence in East Africa. Thousands of Asians went to Britain. I was also worried that something similar might happen in Kenya, so I started looking at my options. I was doing extremely well economically and socially in Nairobi and did not want to leave Kenya. I was a Kenyan citizen.

I had started moving into the upper circles of the Nairobi Asian community. I was on the Lions Club Committee and had also joined the Freemasons. I was often invited to parties which were held by various foreign government representatives at embassies. It would be hard to leave Nairobi. I was a part time consultant at Kenyatta National Hospital and held a Nairobi University appointment as a lecturer.



Surjit's father, Kundan Singh, was friends with Pitaji and they used to go for walks in Uhuru Park. One day they were robbed by an African wielding a large "*panga*" who threatened to slash them. They both lost their watches and a small amount of money but were left safe. Surjit's mother died and her father went to live in Ludhiana in retirement.

I also had an incident. I had sacked our servant for stealing. After Independence, labour officers were created and they notoriously would chase employers after servants were sacked, for more money. They were ruffians. I had one turn up at home and when I refused to give him more money and as I turned to go back inside, he hit me on the back of my head and then ran off.

If it were not for my turban, he would have seriously injured me. I was saved by God, my faith, and my turban. The police never found him, but they were also becoming more and more corrupt.

## Visit to India 1972

Dev and I visited India in 1972 on a round trip from Nairobi that included the UK as well.

**Dev with Narain Singh's daughters-in-law in Dhindsa.**



**Dev with Bauji and family in Jagraon.**

## Plans to Leave Kenya

I had several choices to emigrate. The UK was number one, the others were USA, Canada and Australia.

All the High Commissioners and Ambassadors were my patients. I initially got a visa to go to the UK. I was a Kenyan Citizen and had to have a visa to work in the UK. I went to the UK, where I already had contacts and looked around, and talked to several Indian Ophthalmologists who were residents there. I did not like the working conditions and of course, the winters frightened me. I had lived in the tropics all my life and was happy in a warm climate. So, the UK was out.

I still was not quite sure what to do. I had a job offer in North Carolina in the USA which I declined. Canada did not fully recognise my Australian Fellowship and they asked me to do at least one year of Fellowship training in Canada before they would consider me as a consultant.

I used to send Christmas cards to Dr Rogers in Sydney. Dr Rogers was a consultant at the Eye Hospital and was helpful to me when I was there. I had misplaced his address, so I went to



the Australian High Commission to get his address from the telephone directory.

I was just walking around in the Embassy when the High Commissioner came out. He had been my patient once. He invited me into his office and asked me the reason I was there. It was then, he suggested I should go to Australia. The Whitlam Government had relaxed immigration rules for the non-whites. He advised that I should fill out the forms which he would forward to them to Canberra and while they looked at my papers in Canberra, I had time to think about migrating. So, he filled the forms out in my presence and promised to post them in the next diplomatic bag to Canberra.

I was reading an article in the British Medical Journal when I saw an ad for an Ophthalmologist in Newcastle. A Dr. Sep Owen was offering a partnership to an Ophthalmologist in his practice. The offer looked quite attractive and so I applied, sending in my CV. I got his reply promptly, accepting my application! I decided to go by myself initially to work in Dr. Owen's practice for a few weeks and look at the conditions.

Meanwhile, we received a reply from Canberra stating that my application to migrate to Australia had been approved! This came as a surprise. We had the medical done for the whole

family. Dev was expecting Mandy! I thought they would take several months to decide. I think the decision was quick because I was already registered to practice medicine in Australia. That was good news. I thought it was time to move out of Kenya. The kids had a better future in Australia. I was already registered as an Ophthalmic Surgeon in New South Wales. I would not have to do any further exams unlike if I went to the USA or Canada. Dev had already spent a year in Sydney while I was doing my Fellowship training at the Eye Hospital in 1966 to 1968. She was happy about going to Australia.

I thought it would be wise for me to go alone initially and check out the situation. I was doing well in Nairobi and was not in a great hurry to leave. I had four children and did not want to migrate to Australia unprepared. I had family discussion about this with my parents and Meekay.

I arranged for a locum Ophthalmologist to work in my practice while I was away in Australia. The plan was to spend about two months there and check out Sep's practice.

## Back in Sydney

I landed in Sydney in March 1976. I was quite relaxed; I knew the city well from my previous stay in 1966 to 1968 when I was doing my Fellowship training at the Sydney Eye Hospital. I stayed in a hotel overnight, I think it was the Hilton.

The next day I took a train to Newcastle and got off at Broadmeadow Railway Station. This had all been previously arranged with Dr Sep Owen over the phone. He picked me up from the railway station and took me to his house. Sep appeared to be a nice person and was very polite and helpful. His wife, Jenise, was also very pleasant. Sep drove me to his surgery the following day and showed me his set up. It was pretty good. The surgery was in Denison Street, Hamilton. There were two consulting rooms. I would work in one and Sep in the other. His wife, Jenise, was the secretary/receptionist. There was another girl who worked a couple of days, part-time.

After spending a few days at Sep's house, I moved into the Masonic Lodge building in Bolton Street. This was a two-story building with rooms to let. There was an attached restaurant in the building. I was quite comfortable there.



I had to catch a bus to Hamilton to work. During this time, I met Dr Rajwant Khaira and family. Sep had told him about me. Through Rajwant I met Tejinder Khaira and his wife Kusum, Praduman and his wife Surinder, Ranjit Nanra and wife Surinder and Baljeet Bagga and his wife Ashu. They were all general medical practitioners in the Newcastle area.

They were all very nice to me and they invited me into their homes for dinner. I also met Dr Prem Nanda who was not married at that stage. He was originally from Singapore and had studied Medicine in India in Patiala, the same medical school where Teji and Praduman had been students. They had known each other for years.

I found them to be a good group of people where my family would feel comfortable. Rajwant had his surgery in Islington, a suburb next to Hamilton where Sep had his rooms. Rajwant had a spare room on the first floor of his surgery which was next to Hamilton Railway Station. He invited me to stay there as it would be nearer to my place of work with Sep. It was walking distance. I accepted this offer and stayed there for the rest of my stay in Newcastle.

The work was routine. I was faster than Sep in seeing patients as I was used to running a very busy practice in Nairobi. Sep

gave me 60% of my earnings. I made about \$3,000.00 and deposited this into my saving account. The working conditions were good. I think I worked for about 8 to 10 weeks. Sep was happy with me and we agreed to be partners.

During my stay in Newcastle, I went to Sydney and saw some old Indian friends. Wadhwa was one of them and Narinder Gundara who was a medical student at Makerere College when I was studying there. He was about three years behind me. He later died of alcohol related problems. Narinder Gundara had his practice in Blacktown, Sydney.

I also went to Wollongong and met Dr Jagir Singh (Ravi's dad). I think Ravi's mum was in India at that time. I stayed with Dr Ramnik Shah who was my classmate at Makerere and we had qualified together in 1962. I also met Dr Ravi Khanna who was an ex-Makerere College student. His wife was my old teacher's (Mr Gupaldas's) daughter and I knew her from primary school in Nakuru. They were all happy to see me.

I left Australia in good spirits.

## Time to Leave Kenya

The time had come for me to leave Kenya as the political situation and personal security was becoming a problem. Furthermore, I did not see a secure future for my children in Kenya.

The practice in Nairobi was booming! I did not want to leave Nairobi. I was well known there now, both socially and professionally.

I was a member of Nairobi Lion's Club and also became a Free Mason. It was very difficult to join the Free Masons. Only the elite in Nairobi were accepted. Fortunately, I was known in the upper circles and was sponsored by a businessman. I did not gain anything professionally from these institutions, the business community gained considerable advantages by being members. It was just a sense of achievement for a boy from a modest background.

The Vice-President of Kenya, Arap Moi, President Jomo Kenyatta's wife, Mrs Ngina Kenyatta and children were among my patients. I treated all the ambassadors from various



countries. Most of the members of the armed forces were my regular patients. It was not an easy decision to leave Nairobi.

I was also given the position of Visiting Ophthalmic Consultant to the Armed Forces. This boosted my practice even more as all the Defence Force employees became my patients. I have a Letter of Appointment to this position.

I could have gone to the U.K., Canada or the U.S.A. as the High Commissioners and their staff were my patients.

After a lot of thinking I decided on Australia. I had worked there and trained at Sydney Eye Hospital and Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital in Melbourne. My qualifications allowed me to work as a consultant without any other legal requirements.

The Australian climate was also a big factor in my decision to go to Australia.

Mandy was born in May 1976. She was a beautiful baby, like the others. She opened her eyes and looked straight at me as she was being wheeled out of the delivery suite and taken to the newborn babies' ward.

She appeared to be saying, "So you are my Dad?"



**Mandy at 6 Months**

Kiran felt a little displaced by the new arrival because she was not getting enough attention now.

One day Mandy was crying a lot for reasons unknown. I asked Kiran "I think we should take this baby back to the hospital". She said, "No, she is my little sister!!"

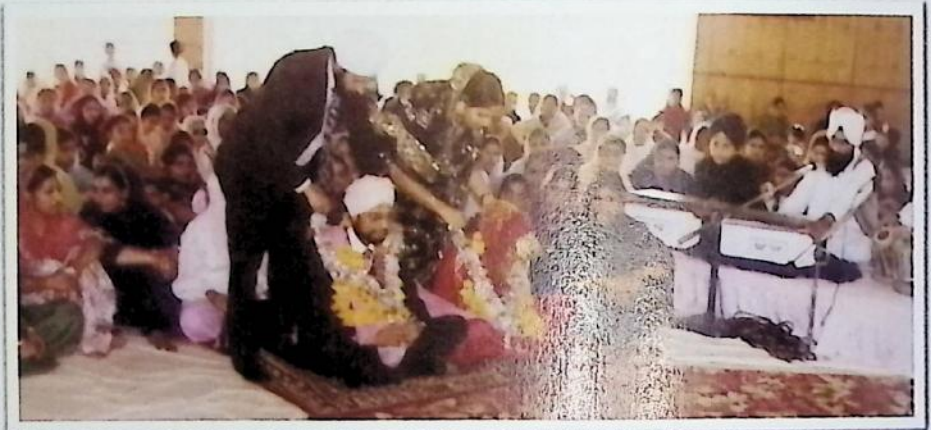
Amrik was working in the University Dental Department and was happy there. We were looking for a girl for him. There were several enquiries from families in Nairobi which we did not consider suitable. We decided that he should marry a well-educated girl, a doctor if possible.

Surjit's father Kundan Singh had received a letter from his relative in India asking him to look for a boy for his daughter who had qualified as an MBBS doctor from the Christian Medical School in Ludhiana. He contacted us and said it was a good family and we should consider her for Meekay. So Gurdeep was chosen. The photographs were exchanged as was the custom then. Amrik had no objection and Gurdeep was happy also and so a meeting was planned in Nairobi.

Gurdeep came over from India. She had relatives in Nairobi, her mother's brother's family. She stayed with them. Amrik and Gurdeep met and talked to each other. There was no objection on either side. So, a wedding was arranged for the 31st December 1976.



### **Amrik and Gurdeep's Wedding**



**Dev and I placing haara and giving Sagan.**

### **The Family Photo at the Wedding**



The ceremony was performed at the South C Gurdwara which was walking distance from our house. Mr. Bowery, my teacher, also attended the wedding. He attended all our family weddings. He had become a good friend.

We had a party in the evening. A marquee was installed in the back yard. Quite a few people attended, and it lasted till quite late. It was fun for all. My patient, Surinder Kumar of Durga Hotel, Nagara was the caterer. He did a good job.

It was a really busy and stressful time as we were due to fly out to Australia the next day.

Our time for date of departure to Australia was coming soon. The last possible day to fly out was 3rd January 1977. If we missed that then the paperwork would have to be done again!

I had sold my Mercedes car a few months before and bought a Ford Sports coupe which I left for Amrik to drive. We also had an MG which Amrik sold later.

The plan was for my family to settle in Australia and then Amrik would follow with Gurdeep, and lastly Pitaji and Beeji would join us. Amrik applied for migration while I was still in Nairobi. I had

already spoken to the Australian High Commission about him. He was promised that a visa would not be a problem.

I tried to sell my practice to Dr Awan who worked at Kenyatta Hospital with me. He was not interested. I was concerned about the patients who had been seeing me loyally over the last few years. It was a remarkably busy practice. I could not leave them in the lurch at a months' notice.

Luckily, a school mate of mine who was in my class at Menengai High School, Nakuru, Kenya came over from the UK. He had a diploma in Ophthalmology from the UK and was planning to move back to Kenya. The climate in the UK did not suit his wife. Her family was quite rich, and they were in Nairobi and were in the clothing business.

I sold the practice to this fellow, Krishan Duggal for a price of KSh 50,000. His father-in-law paid the money. Krishan had no surgical experience and could not do any surgery. The practice gave him a good start in Nairobi. He continued consultations only without doing surgery until he retired in Nairobi. Apparently, he earned a good living.

I was quite apprehensive about migrating to Australia. I had four children and suppose things did not work out then I would have



to come back! How will I support the family if there is no income? Amrik had qualified and had a job and would support our parents until I settled down. I also arranged with Dr Duggal, who had bought my practice, that if things did not work out, I would return to Kenya. I asked him to give me three months to decide.

It was not just the financial side that worried me. It was Dev and the children. Veena was about to go to High school. If they did not settle it would be a problem. I was doing extremely well in Kenya as far as money was concerned. I was worried about whether they would handle this major change in our life. It was no easy decision. On the other hand, the future for the children in Kenya was not great, even though we had no financial worries.

On the positive side, I already knew about Australia and was a fully qualified Ophthalmic consultant. My experience in Kenya would help me to re-establish in Australia even if the partnership with Dr Sep Owen did not work. I knew how to run a successful private practice. I had faith in the Guru and felt that things will turn out okay. We had done well in Kenya and had a good life there, but it was time to move on. I had already arranged admission for Veena to St Anne's High School in Nairobi in case we had to return to Nairobi.

Pitaji, my father, had landed in Kenya with 200 Kenyan Shillings. An African picked his pocket in Nairobi railway station when we were getting out of the train from Mombasa. The train tickets were also in the wallet with the money.

So, we started life in Kenya with zero assets and no money. I was in a much better situation now; I had enough money to go for a while. I had been regularly transferring funds to the U.K. whilst I was working in Nairobi. Money transfer out of Kenya was illegal at that time. One of my Gujarati businessmen friends had been helping me with money transfers. It was not cheap but there was no other choice.

If Pitaji could succeed in Kenya then I should be successful in Australia, God Willing!!

## **CHAPTER 14:     AUSTRALIA**

### **Residence in Newcastle**

We flew out on Kenyan Airways to Mauritius. We landed in Mauritius on an extremely hot day. Mandy was just six months old and learning to sit. I remember she was extremely uncomfortable in the heat. The Mauritius Airport was not air conditioned. We were to catch a South African Airways flight to Sydney. South Africa was a strictly white country at that time. I was a little concerned as to how we would be treated on the plane. The air hostesses were actually very nice and helpful. They made us feel welcome. We were the only non-whites on the plane.

We landed at Sydney Airport the next morning. The children I think were already missing Nairobi. Veena vomited her guts out as soon as we landed in Sydney. The air hostess helped to clean her up. The other children were okay. We took a taxi to a hotel in Sydney, I do not remember which hotel it was. I was familiar with the city and had no problem in finding my way around. When we were settled, I went to the GPO and rang our parents in Nairobi to tell them that we were okay. I also rang Dr Sep Owen to let him know we had arrived in Sydney and that we would catch the train to Broadmeadow Railway Station in Newcastle the next day.



So, the next day we took a taxi to Sydney's Central Railway Station and caught the train to Newcastle. Sep received us at the station and took the family to his house for lunch. He was quite nice and helpful.

Dr Owen had already rented a three-bedroom house for us in New Lambton. It was owned by a University lecturer, Mr. Giles. He had gone to the UK for a year with his family to study further.

The house was fully furnished, and we settled in quickly. We called it "The Giles' House". The backyard of his house backed on the Blackbutt Reserve.

The Giles had left an old cat called Oscar for us to look after. Mandy learned to call it "Okkar" and she used to play with it a lot. It was quite a friendly cat and did not mind Mandy pulling its ears and tail around.

The neighbours were kind and very helpful. We could not buy milk as it was Friday evening and all the shops in Australia were closed for business until Monday. Mandy was crying and hungry. Our neighbour, Mrs Jeff Neil, came to welcome us and when we told her we had no milk she brought us a bottle from her home next door. The shops did not open over the weekend in those days. Rajwant and his wife learnt that we had arrived in

Newcastle and they came to visit us and brought some groceries.

I went to work in Sep Owen's surgery in Denison Street the next day.

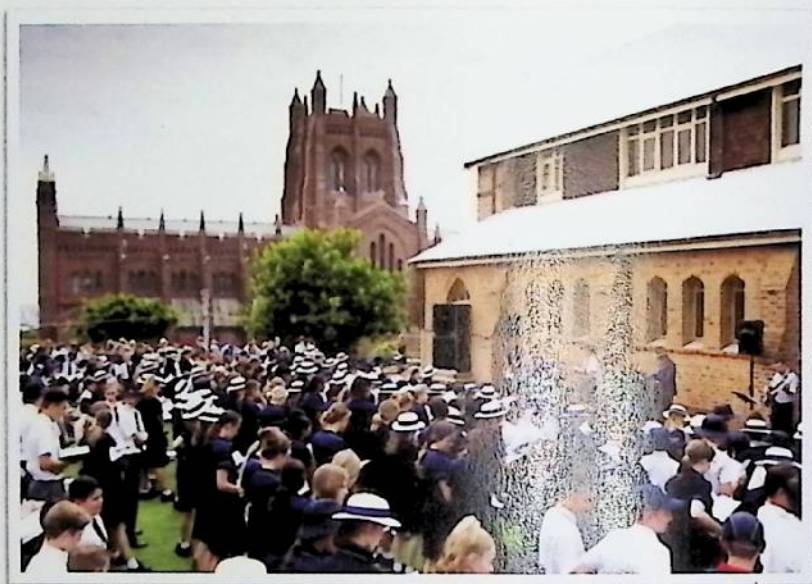
**July 1977**

**Celebrating Veena's 13<sup>th</sup> birthday in the Giles' house.**



Schools started early in January 1977. Veena was accepted at Newcastle Grammar School which was a private school in Newcastle. Most of the doctor's children went there. Veena was accepted into Year 7 which is what she would have done anyway in Kenya.

## Newcastle Grammar School



Our next-door neighbour was Jeff Neil an accountant. His daughter, Jane, went to the same school as Veena and was in the same class. They gave Veena a lift to school every day. Jane was quite friendly initially. Veena was clever at school so a bit of jealousy erupted after some time.

I gave my accounting business to Jeff Neil for tax purposes. Neil was a very conservative accountant and not fully aware of the modern investment strategies. After a year, I changed to another accountant, Mr Butler, who was more forward looking, and he advised me about the benefits of negative gearing etc for wealth building. I did not want to totally depend on my practice income which stopped whenever I was not working, and a steadier



income stream was needed. So, I started looking into real estate.

Pitey and Kiran started at New Lambton Primary School which was within walking distance from our rented house in New Lambton. Kiran went into Class 1 and Pitey was in Class 5. Kiran found it a bit hard to adjust to a new school. Pitey seemed to be okay, she always made friends easily.

Kiran missed Kenya a lot. She would cry and say, "I want my own house, all my toys and I want Pitaji and Beeji here". She would say to me "Dad can you bring all my toys, then my house here soon, and also Pitaji and Beeji?"

Veena after the initial excitement of a new school, also missed Kenya, she would sometimes come home and cry and say, "I have all my friends in Nairobi".

I was worried, I had given myself three months or so to settle. If the children did not settle within that time, then I would go back to Kenya and join my old practice in Corner House in Nairobi.

I even wrote to the Senior Surgeon Mr Kodwawalla in Nairobi at Aga Khan Hospital and asked if he would renew my appointment at that Hospital!!

Dev did not look quite happy, but she never complained. I think she understood that the children had no future in Kenya. Mandy was okay, she was too young to notice any change. Fortunately, she was coping alright.

The children soon settled into a routine and made new friends. I was relieved and concentrated on my practice.

The plan was to buy into Sep Owen's practice. A price of \$20,000 was agreed. That was big money then. The dollar had value; you could fill a car tank with petrol for about \$7 and \$30 worth of groceries would overload a shopping trolley!

The money had to be paid in instalments. Sep Owen was basically a nice person but was very insecure and greedy. His wife was our secretary. She closely watched all my activities including any phone calls I made.

Three months elapsed. The children were okay. We bought a Toyota Corona car which served us well for a while.

## Partners and a Book of Conditions!!

After about three months Sep drew up an agreement for us to be full partners. To my utter surprise, it was a book of conditions quite a few pages long!!! There were conditions like, if a patient died and left money to the practice it would belong to Sep. This did not worry me. There were other conditions that were mostly in Sep's favour. He owned the building on Denison Street, Hamilton where we had the practice.

There was one condition I could not tolerate. He had written into the agreement that if I died before the agreed price of \$20,000 was paid to him then he would have the right to sue my wife for the remaining money!! That really pissed me off (as the Aussies would say). I told Sep that my family in the event of my demise would look to him for help and not dragged through a court case to sue them. I could not agree to this condition and Sep refused to remove it from the document.

I showed the "book" of conditions to a solicitor whose daughter was at Veena's school. I knew him briefly and did not know anybody else in Newcastle. His name was David Lockhart. He was an older man and was very nice to me. He read the 'Book of Conditions' and started laughing loudly in my presence. He said he had never seen such a detailed document of conditions in his many years of practice as a solicitor. He told me in a typical



Australian way that “only if you were an utter nincompoop would you sign this agreement as there was nothing in my favour, it was all for Sep Owen”.

I just wanted his opinion I had already decided not to join Sep's practice. That indeed was a big risk with a family of four young children and a new country! I said to myself “Guru Ji” will help as he had done in the past.

## Rooms in Gordon Street

There was a General Surgeon (Dr Jack Smythe) who owned in rooms in Gordon Street a few houses away from Sep's surgery. I talked to this surgeon and fortunately he had one room he could rent to me. So, I moved into this room the next day.

I told Sep that since he was so rigid about his conditions that I did not want to join his practice. He was really annoyed with me.

I had imported a slit lamp from Kenya when I moved to Australia. Sep's practice was on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. He brought the slit lamp down during the night and told his secretary that I was not to enter his surgery again. So, I took the slit lamp and installed it in the Gordon Street Surgery. I rang OPSM and asked if they could supply an eye chart and a box of lenses which they promptly supplied in a few days. OPSM was the only optical company in Australia at that time. They helped establish Ophthalmologists in new practices. It was a benefit to OPSM as they got work from them.

Sep had another part time secretary in his rooms. She kindly directed my old patients to my rooms even though she was risking her job. She was a good person. I had won two tickets in a raffle at a furniture shop in Charlestown (John Peschar) to see

ABBA in concert in Sydney. ABBA had just arrived in Australia for a few concerts. I had no intention of going, so I had given the tickets to Sep's secretary a few weeks before I left. This may have worked in my favour with her, as when a patient rang Sep's surgery, his wife would say that I had left, and they did not know where I was.

Eventually patients found out where I was. Newcastle was a small town. Some patients I had treated from the RAAF Base also followed me to my new practice.

I also went to see the local general practitioners, advising them about my new practice. They were very helpful, and the practice started well. I used Dr Smythe's staff for my billing as I had no idea about the local medical system. Their service to me was included in the rent I paid to Dr Smythe. They did the banking also.

I was soon doing well. I had a lot of experience of running a private practice in Nairobi which helped me to get established quickly. I was also able to get an appointment at the Mater Hospital where I did all my surgery. There were no private hospitals in Newcastle at that time. I soon decided to buy my own premises for a surgery as there was not enough space in Dr Smythe's rooms for me.

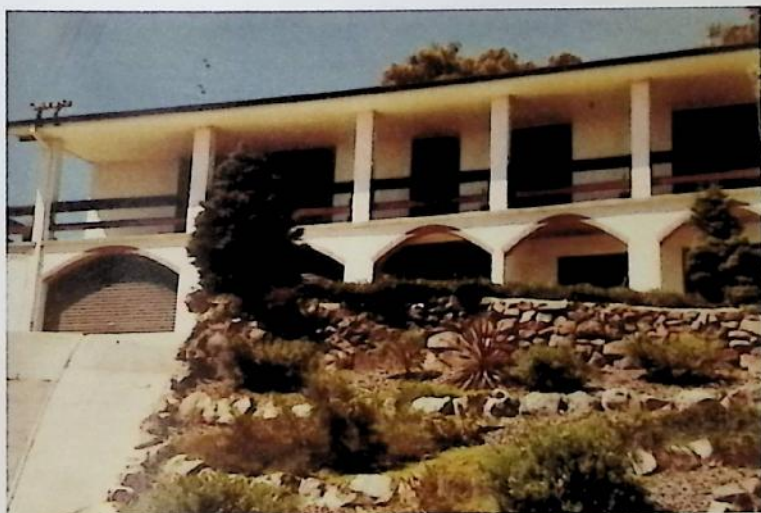


## A House on a Hill

The other priority was to buy a house. The house in New Lambton was rented and had to be vacated at the end of 1977.

I had money saved in the UK which I had been sending from Kenya. I did not at this stage want to use that money, so I applied for a loan. The branch manager was quite helpful. He later became my patient and his wife still sees me regularly for an eye check- up. Her husband sadly passed away a few years ago.

We looked at several houses. I needed a big house because of the children. We found one at 19 Sherburn Place, Charlestown. It was big enough for us. The house was owned by a builder who is deceased now, but his wife is still a patient of mine!



It was a four bedroomed house with a large garage and rumpus room. One could easily park four cars in the garage. Mandy learnt to ride a bike in there and used to enjoy riding her bike after I parked the car outside. The house was on a hill and had good views out to Mount Sugarloaf. I still remember the beautiful sunsets we used to watch from the lounge area. The price agreed, \$70,000, was big money at that time as you could buy a house for \$5,000 to \$10,000 in other suburbs such as Maitland. The bank loaned me the money on the recommendation of the Bank Manager.

We moved into the house in December 1977. The children were happy now. Veena was at Newcastle Grammar School, a private school, and took the bus to school from the bus stop on the highway quite close to our house. We used to walk to the bus stop through the motel to the highway. Veena had the bigger bedroom. Dev and I got the front bedroom with an attached bathroom. Pitey had a smaller bedroom next to Veena's room. Kiran and Mandy had to share a bedroom which was next to ours at the front of the house.

Mandy was only 18 months old when we moved into this house. She was walking and could go down the stairs backwards!

Veena did well at end of year exams and moved onto 2<sup>nd</sup> year at High School. Pitey and Kiran also did well and moved onto the next class. They had to be moved to Charlestown Primary School which was not too far from the house. They could walk to school with other children from Sherburn Place. The neighbours were all good and friendly. Dev settled here nicely. One of the neighbour's daughters was Kiran's age and used to spend a lot of time at our house playing with Kiran and Mandy. Her name was Donna. We still meet her in shopping centres. She now has three children.

Charlestown Public Primary School was only up to Class 6, so Pitey and Kiran also attended Newcastle Grammar School during their high school years from Year 7 onwards.

The children settled in their schools. Veena did very well and to the surprise of her teachers she topped in subjects like English! At a parent teacher meeting one of her teachers came to me and told me that at first, he thought Veena was being helped at home to write such good essays. He was only convinced that she was good when he checked her annual exam papers!

When Pitey finished Primary School at Charlestown, she had to sit a test to enter Veena's school and we were so pleased when



she was awarded a scholarship which meant I only had to pay part of the school fees; the rest was covered by the scholarship.

As it was a larger house, we were able to invite more of our friends and entertained quite often with lunches and dinners. During the summer families would come over to watch the cricket.

When we had first arrived in Australia, there were only around 11 other Sikh families. We were at each other's houses almost every weekend. The children were around the same age and they played with each other. Dev's cooking was highly appreciated! The ladies were always asking her for recipes. She was quite modern in her approach and was always trying new things which the others would then copy! She was the first one to make her own ice-cream cake – highly popular! Now that the girls are grown up, they appreciate her cooking efforts!

We also used to meet the other families at Indian Community Centre events, for example local picnics, cruises on the Hawkesbury river, and evenings with dinner and dance performances.

## Bolton Street Surgery



I started looking for premises for my own surgery. A three-storey building in Bolton Street, Newcastle came up for sale. It was owned by an insurance company which had moved into Hunter Street.

I negotiated a price of \$85,000 and got a loan from the bank. They did not lend money for commercial properties in those days but with the help of my bank manager I was able to obtain a loan. The practice was doing well, they looked at the figures and agreed to lend me most of the money.

This created a bit of a stir in Newcastle and some local businesspeople said, "The Indians were buying the City!". Bolton Street was one of the main commercial streets next to Hunter Street in Newcastle. The Newcastle Herald owned the building next door. Attwater's Solicitors were on the other side of my building.

I converted the middle floor to my new surgery. I had it air conditioned and partitioned. The top floor was rented to an insurance broker. The ground floor was initially rented by a hairdresser which included the basement area also. There was no lift. It was not far from the Newcastle Railway Station and bus stops and was easily accessible. There were only six other Ophthalmologists in town and my practice was busy.

The purchase of the building created a bit of envy in some Indian General Practitioner friends and they stopped referring patients. I was well established by now (middle of 1978). I had a very good following of patients from all over the Hunter Area including as far as Singleton, Muswellbrook, Maitland, Belmont etc.

I employed two secretaries, Chris a senior and Annette a junior. The senior was a nursing sister who wanted a change from nursing. The junior was only about 17 or 18 years old. They



were good girls and very friendly and helpful to promote my practice. People were not fully used to seeing non-white specialists. Patients would often ask the secretaries if I was a good surgeon. The answer would be "He is the best!"

The senior secretary had worked in a medical practice before and was familiar with Medicare billing. I had no idea what to do. She taught the younger secretary. They could both type well and typed my letters to the GP's. These two girls helped me a lot in developing my practice. Chris resigned after about three years as she was moving up country.

Annette then became the senior secretary as she knew all the routine. I employed another junior whose name was Roslyn. We called her Rosie. Rosie was only 17 years old and had just come to Newcastle from a little farm near Bulahdelah. Her older sister was already in Newcastle. Rosie or Ros was initially a very shy person. She was frightened to answer the phone in case she said something wrong or did not understand what the patient wanted.

I did a lot of minor surgeries in my rooms, pterygia's, lid procedures etc. The girls would assist me with the surgeries. Rosie had lived on a farm and slaughtered pigs and she said she

was not afraid of seeing blood. The first surgery she assisted me with was a rather bloody lid surgery. To my surprise Rosie fainted, I thought she was used to seeing blood!! When she came around, she said the blood itself did not worry her, it was the amount of human blood that shocked her. She eventually became my best assistant. She soon learnt all the instruments, sterilising the instruments and setting up the trays for every procedure. Her written English was initially not particularly good. She improved a lot with time and typed my letters accurately.

Then Annette got married and resigned to spend time with her husband. Rosie became the senior secretary and could run the surgery well.

We employed another junior named Michelle. She was about 17 or 18 years old. Rosie trained her and she also became quite proficient in her work.

All the billing etc was done by the girls. I continued my clinical work and the practice ran quite smoothly.

## Visiting Medical Officer

To be successful as a surgeon in Newcastle one had to have a public hospital appointment as a VMO (Visiting Medical Officer). There were no private hospitals at the time. All the surgery had to be done in a public hospital. The main hospital was the Royal Newcastle where all the other Ophthalmologists had appointments. The other hospital was the Mater Hospital in Waratah, which at that time was run by the Catholic nuns. I applied for VMO rights to both these hospitals. The Mater Hospital promptly gave me the job and the necessary operating times in the theatres. I also dealt with all the emergency work in that hospital.

The Mater Hospital was close to B.H.P's workshops. Nearly 30,000 people worked for B.H.P. and most of the working age men worked there. Newcastle's economy was totally dependent on B.H.P. I was their main surgeon and treated a lot of industrial injuries.

The Royal Newcastle hospital refused to appoint me. I was told by the Medical Superintendent that even though I was well qualified, the V.M.O. Ophthalmologists had objected to my appointment. I was the only one with a Fellowship in Ophthalmology in Newcastle. The rest had only diplomas from the UK which is a much easier exam. The administrators would



have liked to appoint me but the committee of Ophthalmologists had unanimously rejected my application so I could not be given a VMO position at the Royal Newcastle Hospital! I think they felt threatened by my presence. They hoped I would probably leave Newcastle if they made me feel unwelcome.

I had good support from the Mater Hospital administration and the nuns were good to me.

The White Australia Policy was abolished in 1973 but it did not affect Newcastle at that time. The Ophthalmologists could not physically get rid of me, they could just make me feel unwelcome.

Fortunately, the general practitioners, both whites and non-whites, started sending patients to me. They were very happy with my treatment and word of mouth spread my name. Lots of patients came to my practice from other practices. I had a lot of surgical experience from Kenya and had done more surgery than any of the Newcastle Ophthalmologists. I had been attending courses in Ophthalmic surgery at Moorfields Hospital in the U.K. while I was still in Kenya and had training at a tertiary level unlike the Ophthalmologists in Newcastle. I also had a Fellowship in Ophthalmology from the U.K. I was also a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

## Reunited with Family

Amrik and Gurdeep arrived in Australia in 1978 when we were in Charlestown. They were both offered jobs in Broken Hill Hospital by the Australian Government - Amrik as a dentist, and Gurdeep as a medical practitioner. Rai was born in Broken Hill.

Amrik and family spent about two years in Broken Hill. They then moved to Glenfield in West Sydney where they bought a house and Gurdeep started a general practice. Amrik started work as a dentist initially at the Dental Hospital in Sydney and later started private practice in Campbelltown and Fairfield in Sydney. The young boys Orin and Jai are twins. They were born in Sydney in 1980. Amrik specialised in Orthodontics at the Dental Hospital.

My middle brother Bans also migrated to Australia in 1980 with his wife and two children, Sandy and Laveen.

Bans had a good job offer from the Defence Department in Canberra, so this was where they settled. Bans had lived in the U.K. for many years. He qualified as an engineer there and had a good job.

Pitaji and Beeji were still in Kenya. They missed the children and felt isolated. They had lived with me in Nairobi since I qualified as a doctor. Beeji helped a lot in bringing up the girls as both Dev and I were working. Pitaji kept busy doing things at home and would go into town for shopping

We felt that Pitaji and Beeji were getting old and would not be able to survive by themselves in Nairobi even though we had our own house in South C. Amrik and Gurdeep were both working, and they needed help with childcare. So, we sponsored our parents to come to Australia. They arrived later in 1979 and started living with Amrik and Gurdeep in Glenfield. Beeji had to do babysitting for the twins.

The South C house was sold, rather cheaply. It was bought by a schoolteacher from Nakuru, Mr Bhangu. I knew this teacher from Menengai High School, Nakuru. He was now working as a travel agent in Nakuru.



## Family Holidays

### The Gold Coast



I was doing well in practice and could afford to take the family on a holiday to the Gold Coast a few times stopping at the Big Banana in Coffs Harbour, which was a banana plantation with all things banana! The children enjoyed it. A small open train weaved its way through the plantation.

We stayed in self serviced apartments on Broadbeach and enjoyed the summer holidays relaxing by the pool, walking on the beach and shopping. The children played cards and board games. There were markets along the beach which sold all sorts of things like clothes and trinkets. One could even go on camel rides!

## Broadbeach



A Gurdwara which had been established in Woolgoolga in the late 50's was the first one in Australia, and we often stopped at it enroute to the Gold Coast. It had been set up by Sikhs who owned the banana plantations. The families were so hospitable and welcoming that they invited us to one of their weddings. Teja Singh, the president of the Gurdwara, asked us to lunch at his house. This was the first time I saw aloo matter cooked with bacon! When we left, they gave us a big bunch of bananas.

Once we went in my Toyota Corona. Then I bought a Ford Fairlane which was a bigger car, and we could all comfortably sit in it. Mandy often sat in Dev's lap in the front passenger seat. There were no seat belts in those days!! The others sat in the back and never complained. They loved these long road trips.

## **Fiji**

We also had several summer holidays in Fiji which were thoroughly enjoyable. The Fijian people are very relaxed and friendly. Time seems to mean nothing there. Fijian ladies were always sitting on the ground selling their hand-woven baskets, hats and necklaces. We have been there again, with the grandchildren. They also enjoyed it. Our favourite Indian restaurant is still there. Dev decided to try the hot Fiji birds eye chillies, and nearly fainted as she could not cope with the strength of the chilli! A tall cold glass of lemonade rescued her, thank goodness!

## **India**

In December 1979 when the kids were on school holidays, we decided to take a holiday to India. Dev's father, Bauji, had a big house in Ludhiana which he built after retiring from the East African Railways. He had a good pension and was living comfortably in Ludhiana. We left for India only a few days after Pitaji and Beeji arrived in Australia.

We landed in New Delhi Airport and caught the bus to Ludhiana. Mataji, Dev's stepmother was happy to see us and looked after us well while we were there. Dev's eldest sister, Bibi, lived nearby and came to see us often. Her daughter, Sokhi, lived



with Bauji and Mataji and helped in the house. Mataji ran a small school for preschool aged children in this house.

The trip to India was quite an experience for the children, they saw all the crowds and enjoyed rides in rickshaws and once in a horse drawn cart. We engaged a driver by the name of 'Balu' to drive us around. I did not like to drive in India as no body follows the traffic rules. Left and right means nothing there!

Balu was a rash driver and one day nearly got us killed at a railway crossing in Ludhiana. He ignored the red-light sign at the railroad junction and drove through before the gates closed. The gates closed soon on either side of us trapping the car on the railway line and we could see the train coming towards us!

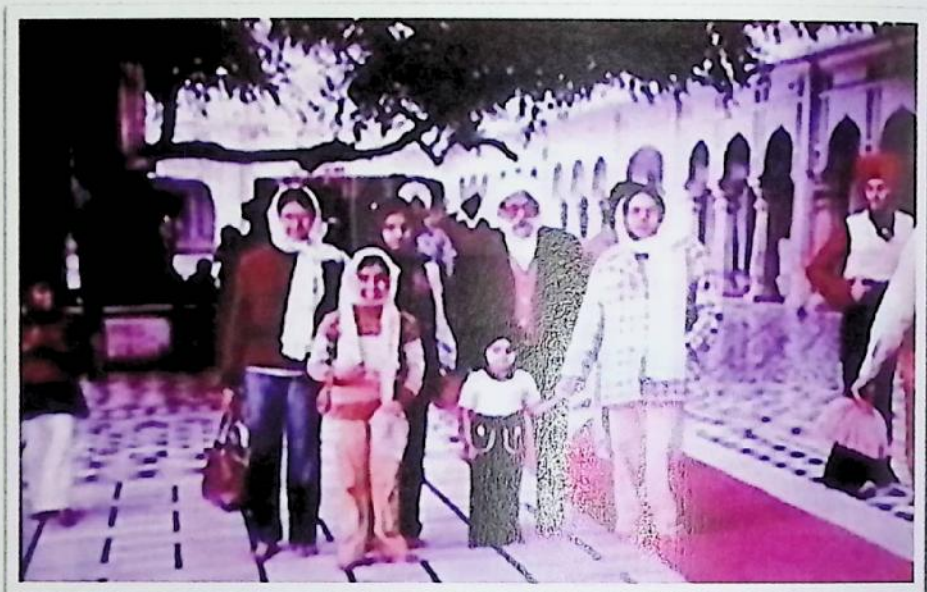
He could not move the car forward or backwards because the gates had been closed. I said my prayers and really thought that was the end of us! The whole family would be wiped out soon!!! Luckily the railway guard in the guard tower noticed our plight and quickly opened the front gate and we drove through in the nick of time and then the train zoomed through behind the car missing us by about 30cms!!

I think the children enjoyed seeing relatives in India. I took them to see our ancestral village of Dhindse and Beeji's ancestral village of Saundha.

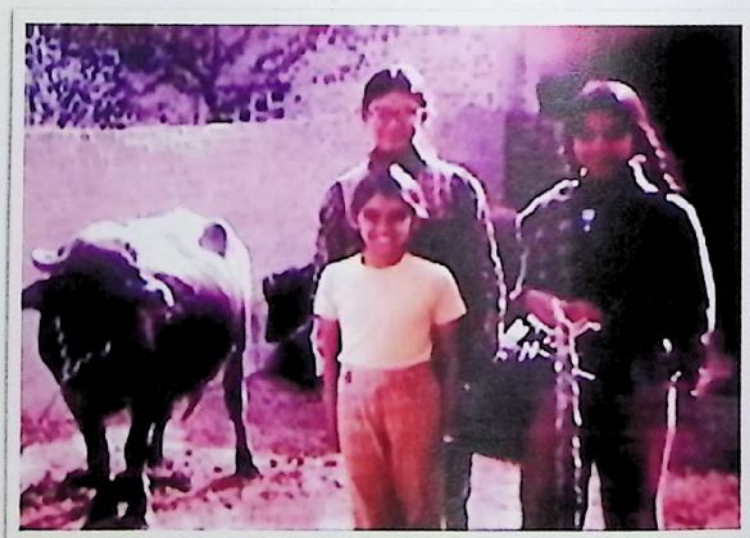
There was a lot of rubbish lying everywhere in the village. Kiran had eaten a mandarin and had the peel in her hands. She asked me where she could throw the skin. I just pointed in any direction. She came back and still had the peel in her hand. I said, "Why have you not thrown that away?" She said, "Dad where is the garbage bin?" It took quite a bit of persuasion to make Kiran throw the skin on the ground. There were never any garbage bins in Indian villages.

We all went to the Golden Temple in Amristar. Balu drove us there and brought us safely back to Ludhiana even though he went off the road once.

In Amristar we had lunch at Kesar's Dhaba which my Indian friends in Australia had advised us to do. I did not find it particularly special. The food was like in any wayside "dhaba" in Punjab.



**The children with Bauji and Dev at Harmandir Sahib.**



**Kiran Pitey and Veena in Saundha**



Kiran outside  
the Golden  
Temple



We spent a few days in Delhi with my mother's cousin and her family. I took the children to see the Qutab Minar. We also went to the historical Gurdwaras. The children were not impressed with the filth and poverty in some parts of India, otherwise they were okay.

One incident stood out in my mind which showed corruption at all levels. While we were sitting in my fathers-in-law's house in Ludhiana a fellow knocked on the door. He had an electricity worker's uniform on. He called my father-in-law out and said that for about 50 rupees he could turn the reading in the electric meter back so that he would not have to pay anything for his electricity usage.

My father-in-law was furious, being from Kenya he was not used to this sort of illegal action. So, he said to the man, "I will report you to your supervisor!" The man calmly pointed his finger to another worker who was standing on the road and said, "That is my supervisor, he sent me to talk to you and if you do not agree, then as we have turned all the other meters back in the street, you will have to pay for all of them!"



I also visited my old school in Jallah!

## My Practice

My practice was busy, the only problem was that old people found it hard to climb stairs to see me. No-one complained as they were getting good service from me. My secretaries Chris and Annette were very capable and friendly, and patients liked them. I would see anything from 40 to 60 patients in a day of consultations.

I was used to carrying out quick consultations from my experience in Kenya. A private hospital was started by some businesspeople in Merewether. It was called Lingard Private Hospital. I started seeing my private patients at this hospital.

I was invited by one of my patients, who was the Chairman of the Cessnock Hospital Board, to work at Cessnock Hospital which was fee for service. I had treated the Chairman for a bad corneal ulcer. He was happy and grateful for what I had done for him, however I could not keep going to Cessnock for too long as my Newcastle practice was very busy.

Newcastle University started a Medical school in 1978. I was invited to be an Honorary Lecturer in Ophthalmology. The students used to come to my rooms for training.



The local Ophthalmologists realised that I was not going to leave town, so they grudgingly accepted me, but mostly ignored me.

I was appointed as a VMO at Wallsend Hospital which was a fee for service hospital in Newcastle. This boosted my income a lot as I could do public patients there and charge the government for the surgery. I was interviewed by the Hospital Board Committee. Another couple of Ophthalmologists had also applied but I was selected. Newcastle was changing!

The Newcastle / Hunter Area population was increasing. The Royal Newcastle Hospital was not big enough to cope with the increased number of patients, so a new hospital was planned, called the John Hunter Hospital. The hospital opened in New Lambton in May 1991. I had been in Newcastle for nearly 14 years by this time!

All the local Ophthalmologists were asked to apply for VMO positions at the new hospital. I also applied and sent my detailed Curriculum Vitae to the administration. The Head of the Surgical Department was a young Australian Professor. He was a surgeon, and the Eye and ENT Departments came under him. He became the Head of all the Surgical Units. He was responsible for all surgical VMO appointments including Ophthalmology.

I received a call from him one day. He asked me to become the Head of the Eye Department at the John Hunter. He said, he had looked at all the CV's and mine was the best. I had previous teaching experience in Kenya, at the University of Nairobi, and had published research papers in various Ophthalmology journals. I was really surprised to hear from him. I initially refused as the practice was very busy. He insisted and convinced me that my expertise was needed in the University to teach Ophthalmology. So, I accepted the position.

The local Ophthalmologists could not do anything! They had to accept me as Head of the Department.

I was also given the position of Honorary Senior Lecturer in Ophthalmology at Newcastle University. I did this job for ten years. It involved a lot of meetings. I eventually resigned to spend more time with Dev. The children had grown up and moved out.

Nick Greiner was the Premier of NSW from 1988 to 1992. He appointed Ethnic Affairs Committees in Sydney and Newcastle to listen to the migrant's problems and help them. I was invited to be a member of the local Ethnic Affairs Committee in Newcastle.

The number of meetings I had to attend were numerous so, I did not take part in the running of the committee. I think I was asked to be on the committee because I was a Sikh and people in Newcastle knew about me through my work in Ophthalmology. I had a lot of "new" Australians as my patients. I received a Certificate of Appreciation from the Premier for my contribution.





My surgical practice was the best in town. I did more cataracts than all the other surgeons. I learned new techniques by attending the American Academy of Ophthalmology in San Francisco and other meetings in Singapore, Malaysia and India when lens implantation was the new technique. I already had some experience from Kenya. I did the first implant in Nairobi in 1976. I did the first Phaco-cataract surgery at Wallsend Hospital in 1986 or earlier. I then bought my own Phaco machine which I used to take to all the hospitals I worked in like the Mater, Wallsend, and Royal Newcastle.

I wrote an article of my experience with the first one hundred cases of intraocular lens implantation surgery and sent it for publication in the Australian Journal of Ophthalmology. They refused to publish it as it was still considered as experimental surgery. The letter from the Editor said that "it will unduly disadvantage the local Ophthalmologists if the article was published". So, I sent the article to an overseas journal and it was duly published.

The other surgeons slowly learnt the Phaco technique, but they were about two years behind me! They came to watch me operate and learnt from me. My surgical work increased tremendously. I used to do 30+ cataracts a week, plus other surgeries. I did minor surgeries in my rooms.

I bought new premises in Broadmeadow in 1983. This was in a small medical centre. All the units were on ground floor with parking in front. My old patients were finding it hard to climb the stairs in Bolton Street. I sold the Bolton Street building for \$300,000. I had bought it for \$85,000.

I then started a branch practice in Belmont in Dr Gordon's building. We used to go there once a week. A lot of elderly people lived in the Belmont area and they found it easier to see me there.

The Broadmeadow surgery was designed for me by an interior decorator and looked quite nice. I had a theatre room added, where I did minor surgeries.

Not bad for a "village boy".

## The Newcastle Gurdwara

When we came to Australia, I felt that my children would get totally westernised and forget their Eastern Values. They would have no knowledge of their religion. So, together with other Sikh families we started having monthly religious programmes in each other's homes. The families did them in turn.

Wherever there was a programme that family would provide "langar". The families participating were Rajwant, Teji, Praduman and Sarjit Ruba. Sarjit Ruba and his wife Sarabjeet could do good Kirtan. There was also Baljeet and Ashu Bagga, Ranjit Nanra and Baldev and Marie. Harpal joined later.

As numbers increased, we started holding these functions in Sarjit Ruba's surgery in Gateshead. Prem Nanda also became a regular participant. This went on for about a year.

Some of us felt that we should have our own Gurdwara. Sarjeet Singh Santa and family had migrated from Malaysia. Sarjeet could do good Kirtan. His father was a Giani in a Gurdwara in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A meeting was called in our Charlestown House. Praduman and Sarjeet and Ranjeet were not in favour of Gurdwara.



At the meeting there was Rajwant Khaira, Tej Khaira, Baldev and Sarjeet Santa. After a long discussion we agreed that we should buy our own premises for prayers even though some families were against it. These families felt we will not be able to run the Gurdwara properly. Rajwant, Teji and I were fully committed and decided to go ahead.

We found that a church building in Jesmond was for sale. It was suitable for our purpose – it was big enough with a function hall and a small kitchen attached to it. The main church was for the congregation's prayers.

The church was being sold because the church community already had two churches in the area but did not have enough people to attend their services. The new generation was not interested in religion. They kept one running. The price was \$23,000. It was a big sum at that time.

We were all newly migrated and my practice was just about picking up. When we were discussing buying a property, I insisted that we should put our money where our mouths were and pay fully. We could not borrow money for the church at that stage.

We all had children in schools. Mine went to a private school and fees were not cheap. With Guru's blessing, we all contributed and raised enough funds to pay off the full price. Rajwant, Teji and I each contributed \$5,000 each. A big amount at that time and other families contributed whatever they could afford. Praduman and Sarjeet Ruba did not participate and never attended the Gurdwara again.

The Holy Granth was brought from India and installed in the Gurdwara and we started monthly programmes. The langar and parshad was brought from home according to the roster. Dev took lots of pains in preparing our langar when it was our turn. Once she even made "jalebis" which everybody enjoyed.

I had started doing Kirtan also. I had been learning how to play the harmonium from a Hindu lady who was a good singer herself. She showed me the basic tunes of Sa, Re, Ga, Ma. I practiced a lot at home. I always wanted to learn how to do Kirtan but did not have an opportunity to do so before. I could have learnt in Nairobi as our house was near the South C Gurdwara. I think I was too busy running my practice. Beeji used to play harmonium in simple tunes in the Ladies Sat Sang at the Gurdwara.

Monthly Sunday prayer sessions were attended by most of the families. We all took part. Sarjeet Santa and I did Kirtan. Rajwant did Ardaas. Later, Sarjeet Ruba's elder brother Gurbachan Ruba also did Kirtan. He was an ex-police officer from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He could do good Kirtan.

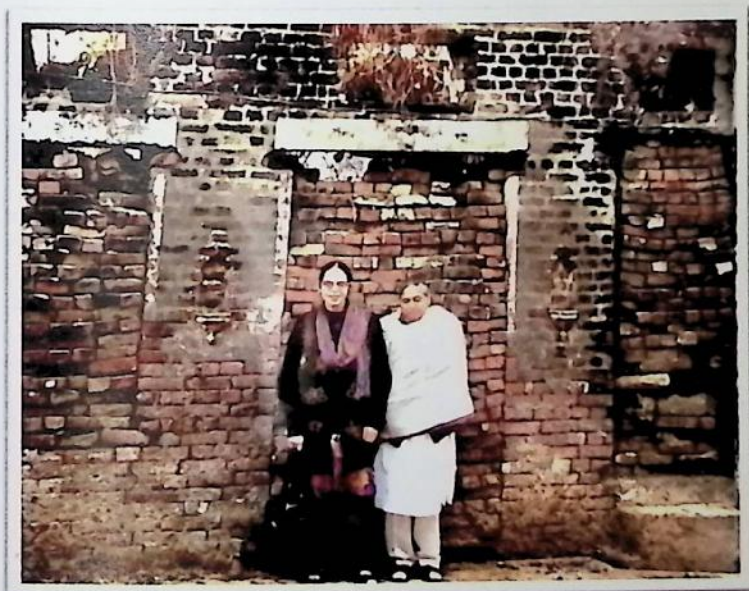
There were only about eleven families for a few years. More Sikh families, mostly from India, started arriving in Newcastle. Eventually we bought the adjoining church building also as the Sangat had increased.



## Trip to India

I took Beeji and Pitaji to India in 1985 to see the relatives.

Pitaji had never gone back to India since 1946 when we migrated to Kenya. I felt he should see the relatives before he gets too old to travel. Pitaji was not very willing to go initially as he did not feel much attachment to India. I left them in India for about three months. They spent most of the time in Saundha in Beeji's village.



**Dev and Sokhi**

**outside the remains of our house in Dhindsa**

Our own house in Dhindsa village had fallen into disrepair because no one lived there anymore, and people had taken away the doors and windows. Only a shell remained.

I took Pitaji and Beeji to the village. Pitaji was sad to see the house in such a bad state.



**Our home was on the right.**

On the way back to Australia I spent a few days with my Masi in Delhi. I bought a copy of Holy Granth Sahib in Delhi. Masiji's husband, Bhag Singh, now deceased, helped me to buy it. We also bought a special bag for it and I kept it with me in the plane. I also brought back Dev's gold jewellery which we had placed in a safe deposit box in Ludhiana during one of our trips to India from Kenya.

We installed the Granth Sahib in one of the upstairs rooms. It was originally Pitey's bedroom but the right size for this new purpose. She moved downstairs to a bigger room.

We used to hold small prayer sessions at home mostly on Sunday morning. Dev got up at 6am to make prashad. The children had to get up early to listen to Gurbani, of which I explained the basics to the children in English.

I had bought a harmonium and used to do Kirtan as well. Dev and I used to recite *sakhis* to them often, which they enjoyed. I wanted to make sure the children understood their religion and the benefit it brought them.



## My Daughters

The girls were doing well at school. Veena finished Year 10 at Grammar School and moved to St Anne's High in Kotara which was a good school for girls. She finished Year 12 there, did well in her HSC exams and gained admission to Medicine at Newcastle University. She stayed at home as it was less expensive than going to Sydney. Newcastle University also had a more practical way of teaching Medicine.

To see the first child go to University and study Medicine brought a great sense of pride for us! I knew that the other girls will also do well.

Pitey finished Primary school at Charlestown, then moved to Newcastle Grammar School for Year 7 onwards and also did her HSC at St Anne's High and gained admission to Dentistry at Sydney University.

Pitey, like the other girls had never lived away from our family. She found it quite difficult to live in Sydney and was quite lonely initially.

When Kiran finished Year 10, she came to me and said, "Dad, I want to do Medicine". She started doing advanced mathematics at home during the holidays. I knew she would do well. She was always well focused. Kiran did her HSC at the Newcastle Grammar School and was the DUX in the final year. She gained admission to Medicine at Sydney University. Pitey was already there so we felt quite safe to let Kiran go to Sydney.

Mandy finished Primary school at Charlestown. She was the school's Vice Captain then also went to Newcastle Grammar School for her High school education. She is an intelligent girl. She decided to study Nursing at the University of Newcastle, did well in her course and has become a very confident person.

All my daughters have been a great source of pride for us. They have grown up to be very sensible and caring individuals. They are good humans and good mothers to their children. They have a good balance between their professional and family life. I often ask for advice from them when I face a problem! We are still very close to one another.

We have seven grandchildren, and they are all beautiful and a great sense of pride for us. I am sure they will do well in life and their chosen professions.

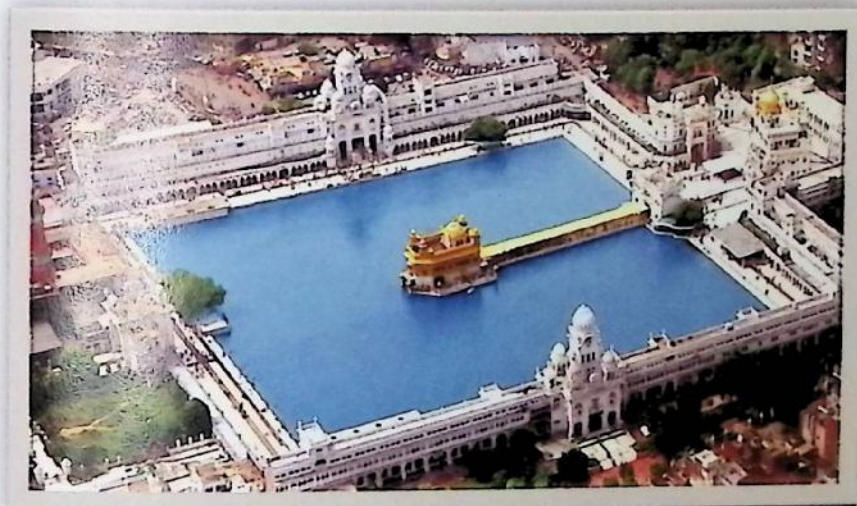
I have always advised the children to hold firm to Sikh values and culture while respecting all other beliefs and cultures. There are a lot of good things in the Australian culture that we should adopt while holding to our own beliefs.



## **CHAPTER 15**

### **Visits to Sikh Religious Places**

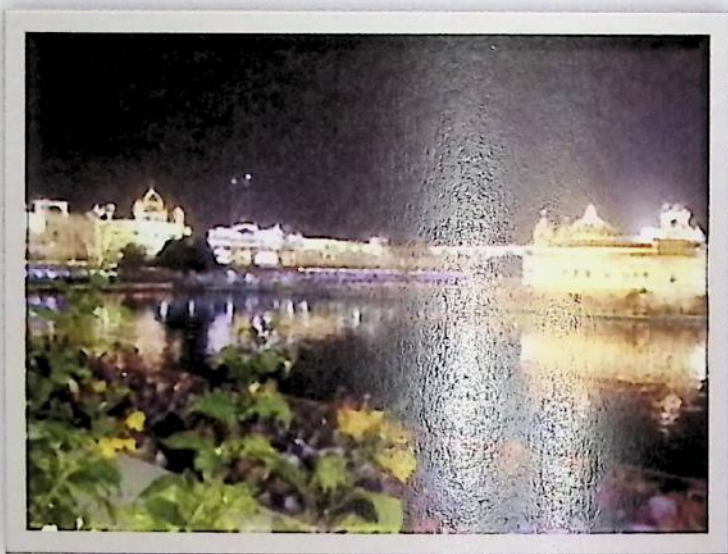
#### **Amritsar**



**Harmandir Sahib, The Golden Temple.**

The first time I went to see the Golden Temple in Amritsar was with my mother, Beeji. I was less than three years old and I still have some vague memories of that visit. Pitaji had been there a few years before when Beeji was expecting me to pray for a boy!

There were a lot of people trying to get to the centre of the temple to do "*Matha Take*" and touch their forehead on the ground in front of Guru Granth Sahib.



**Deepmala at Harmandir Sahib**

It was a hot day, so it must have been summer in Punjab. Beeji carried me on her side and I was feeling extremely uncomfortable and remember saying to her "Let us go home, I don't want to see the Deepmala". (The show of lights which everybody wanted to see in the evening).

Beeji was holding me very tightly as she was warned before coming to Amritsar that people can steal children! She had other ladies from Nanaji's house with her so the danger of losing me was minimal. She was about 19 years old and was rather frightened of the crowds.

My next visit to Amritsar, Golden Temple was in 1968 when I had finished my training at the Sydney Eye Hospital, and I was on my way back to Kenya. My half-sister's son, Jit Singh was with me. We went to Amritsar by bus from Ludhiana. We both had a dip in the sacred water tank (Sarovar), then we went to "Matha take" inside the Golden Temple.

The Golden Temple was built during the times of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Gurus. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had it covered with gold leaf during the Sikh Khalsa Raj. The Temple has four doors, one in each wall indicating that people from all directions and all religions are welcome to enter this Temple. The Temple is in a large pool of water called the Sarovar. Most of the devotees' bathe in this tank of water. There is belief that bathing in this tank purifies the body and listening to the Gurbani purifies the mind. The water has healing properties. Thousands of people from India and all over the world visit this Holy place every day.

A few blocks away is a dining hall where about 100,000 people are served with free meals every day. The Langar is open 24 hours a day. Everybody must sit on the floor. All are equal in Gurus eyes. Langar is open to all races and religions. There are rooms built nearby for people who wish to stay overnight and see the lights spectacle in the evening.



People pray in front of Guru Granth Sahib and ask for any wishes they want to be fulfilled, for wealth, health, prosperity or whatever they wish for. There is always a long queue of people trying to enter the Temple where hymns are sung from the Gurbani continuously.

I have been to the Amritsar several times since then. I took Dev with me every time.

**Dev and Bibi at Harmandir Sahib**



There are a lot of Holy places of Sikh religion in Punjab. I have visited most of them. I have also been to the historical Gurdwaras in Delhi a few times.

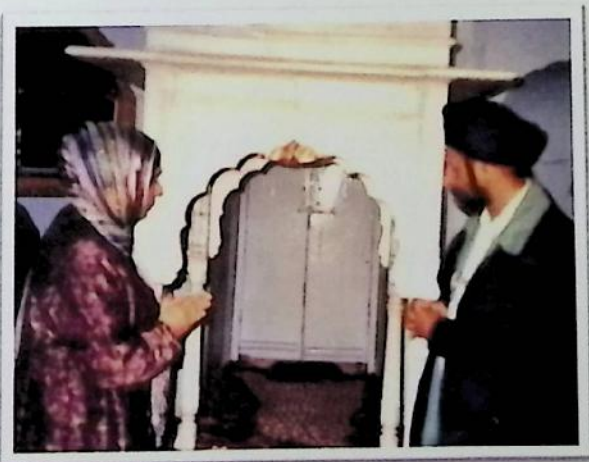
## Lahore

There are some especially important Gurdwaras which are in Pakistan. Guru Nanak's birthplace is in Pakistan Punjab. I always wanted to see these Gurdwaras.

In February 2007 there was an International Eye Conference in Lahore in Pakistan. I registered for this conference and attended it. Dev was with me. We stayed at the Holiday Inn in Lahore. This was also the conference hotel. The local Pakistani people were quite friendly towards us. I hired a car with a chauffeur and visited the Gurdwaras there.

### Birthplace of Guru Nanak

We visited Nankana Sahib which is the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the first Guru. It was quite a large complex with accommodation facilities for up to 200 guests.



The guide showed us the exact room where Guru Nanak was born. There are several other Gurdwaras in that area. They were all closed. Sikh families from Afghanistan were looking after the Nankana Sahib Gurdwara. We made a small donation for the upkeep of the complex.

On the way back from Nankana Sahib to Lahore, we visited the Holy Gurdwara where Guru Arjan Dev Ji was martyred. A Sikh family in Lahore looked after this place.

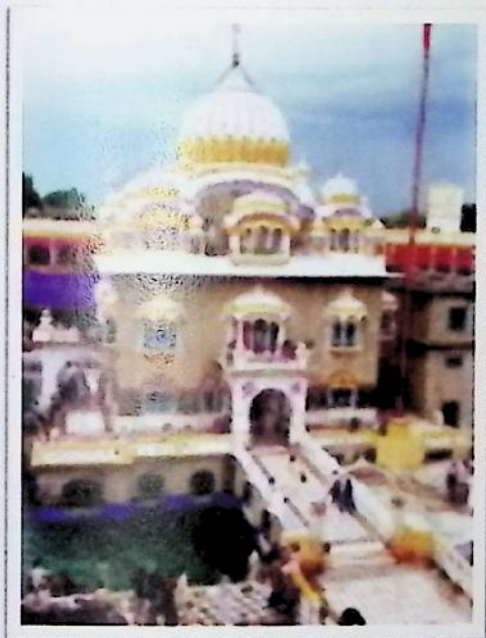
We also visited the Samadhi of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

There was a monument made of cement. There were small pits on the surface. The guide said these are the spots that were embedded with precious gemstones. The diamonds were removed during the British occupation of Punjab.





Lahore used to be the capital of the Sikh Empire. We also visited the place where Ranjit Singh used to hold court. There is a museum nearby displaying objects and arms from Sikh Raj. There are quite a few places of Sikh worship in Lahore which we could not visit.



We hired a chauffeur driven car again from the hotel to take us to Panja Sahib which is a place in the north of Pakistan called Hassan Abdal.

**Panja Sahib.**

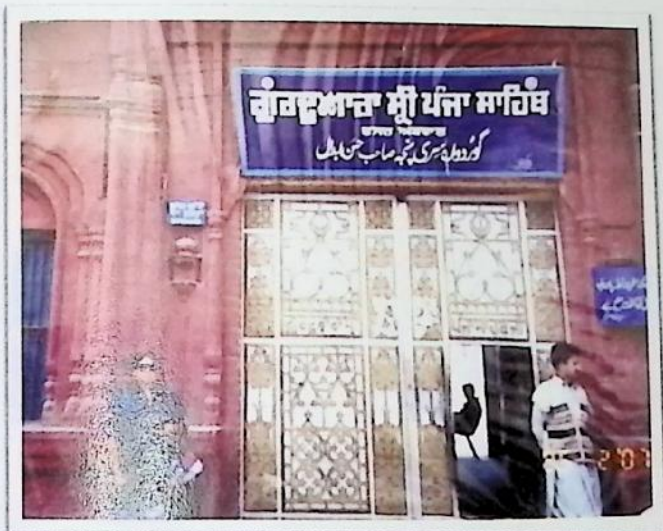
Guru Nanak Ji and his companion Mardana arrived here on their way back from the Middle East after visiting Mecca in Bagdad and other places. The local Muslim mystique called Bali Kandhari lived here. He had achieved great spiritual powers. The only source of water in that area was a small lake which he controlled. People were frightened of him as he controlled evil spirits. No one opposed him and he became quite cruel and arrogant.



Mardana felt thirsty and went to Bali Kandhari for water which he refused. Guruji gave a stick to Mardana and asked him to dip it into the lake and water will follow him. Bali Kandhari was amazed to see the water following Bhai Mardana. He was furious at this and with his great spiritual powers lifted a huge rock and

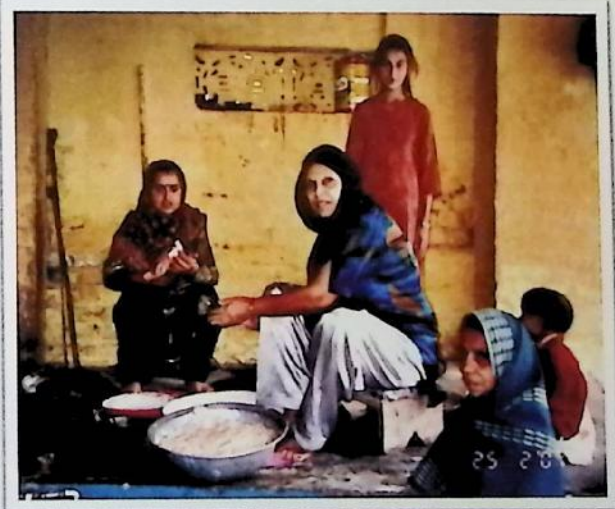
threw it at Guru Nanak. Babaji saw the rock coming towards him and lifted his arm and put his hand on the oncoming rock. The rock became soft like wax and his hand was imprinted on the rock.

Seeing the handprint on the rock, Bali Kandhari realised that this was a truly Holy Master and fell at Guruji's feet and asked for forgiveness. The water became freely available to this day. The hand imprint is still there for people to see and there is a large Gurdwara on the site. We saw this handprint and water still flows from there. There is a pool in which people bathe to cleanse their soul and body.



The entry to see  
Baba Ji's hand  
imprint.

Dev making rotis in  
Punja Sahib



Pilgrims come from all over the world and are provided free food  
from the Langar service.

Dev did some "seva" there and made rotis for the congregation.  
We had lunch there and so did our Muslim driver.



While there we met a family originally from Kenya now living in London. The lady was the aunty of one of my schoolmates in Nakuru, quite a coincidence!

I attended the conference in between my visits to our Holy places. We stayed in Lahore nearly ten days and then walked through the Indian Pakistan border into India. We spent the night in Amritsar which is only about 30km from Lahore. My sister and her husband, Santokh Singh came to receive us at the border. They were on holidays from England. We spent about ten days with them and visited our ancestral village of Dhindsa and went to Saundha, Nanaji's village.

We travelled with them to Delhi and met Beeji's cousin's family there but stayed in a hotel near the Delhi airport.

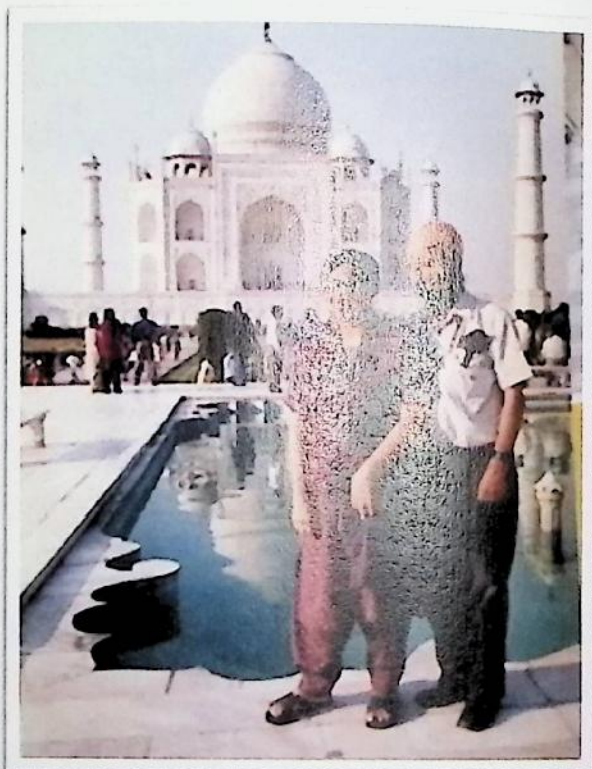
While in Ludhiana, Santokh Singh (Jijaji) and myself went shopping. We went to a small roadside restaurant and ordered two bottles of Pepsi Cola. I gave the man one hundred rupee note which he quickly grabbed and put under the counter and asked me for some money! I told him I had already given him 100 rupees note. He completely denied this and put a 50 rupee note on the counter saying that I had only given him 50 rupees.

I was furious and wanted to argue with him but Jijaji who was a very calm and wise person said "Give him more money, why do you want to quarrel with this man for the sake of £1! So, I had to give the shopkeeper more money and felt annoyed at being blatantly cheated. That is India! The shopkeepers try all sorts of tricks to get money from the tourists!



**Jijaji, my sister and Hardev  
at  
Anandpur Sahib Gurdwara.**

**We also visited the  
Taj Mahal in Agra.**



During this visit to India, we also went to Anandpur Sahib. This is the place where Guru Gobind Singh Ji created the Khalsa, naming all Sikh men '*Singhs*' and all Sikh women '*Kaurs*', and made wearing of five K's compulsory, hence defining the appearance of a Sikh. The five K's are: *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kanga* (comb), *Kara* (steel bangle), *Kirpan* (dagger) and *Kachera* (cotton shorts).

We had visited most of the Sikh Temples in North Punjab and Delhi area. I also wanted to go to Hazoor Sahib which is a few hundred kilometres south of Bombay in Madhya Pradesh.



## Baba Nidhan Singh

Baba Nidhan Singh was born in Dhindsa and I wanted to go and see his Gurdwara there as well.

Baba Nidhan Singh left Dhindsa when he was just a teenage boy. No one in the village knew where he had gone. He meditated a lot when he was young. People thought he may have joined a group of sadhus (wandering holy men).

Not much is known of his life between the time he left the village and reached Hazoor Sahib. The impression is that he had a sort of "pull" towards Hazoor Sahib and ended up there after a few years of wandering. He did a lot of Simran there and also "sewa" at the Gurdwara.

There was no Langar at Hazoor Sahib at that time. Mostly local Sikhs from that area looked after the Gurdwara. They had become selfish and arrogant with time and did not want anybody from Punjab to be there. Nidhan Singh was becoming popular with the sangat. The local sevadars were envious. They got so annoyed with him that they beat him up and accused him of stealing food. They put him in a cart and literally threw him at

the nearby Nanded Railway Station and told him to go back to Punjab or they would kill him.

He was sitting meditating on the railway platform waiting for the train to come so that he could return to Punjab when he had a vision.

He saw a very bright light moving towards him. When it came close to him, he saw Guru Gobind Singh Ji standing next to him. Guru Ji asked him "*Nidhan Singh, where are you going?*" He folded his hands and said, "Guru Ji, the local priests beat me up and have thrown me here and have ordered me to go back to Punjab or I will be killed!"

Guru Ji said "*You have to go back to Hazoor Sahib and start Langar sewa there. My Sikhs come to Hazoor Sahib from all over the world and have no food to eat there*". Baba Nidhan Singh said, "Guru Ji I have no money, how am I going to start Langar sewa?"

Then Guru Ji caught hold of Nidhan Singh's right hand and put it into the side pocket of his robe. Guru Ji said, "*Hath thera Khisa mera*" (hand is yours; pocket is mine). "*You take out as much*

*money as you want. You will never be short of funds."* Then the Spectacle disappeared.

Nidhan Singh went back to Hazoor Sahib and started Langar sewa. That Langar is still going all these years later! He gained a lot of respect with the sangat and the priests could not hurt him.

Baba Nidhan Singh returned to visit Dhindsa, his place of birth, after many years. He was getting old now. He recognised his childhood friends and members of his family. He had a few Sewaks with him who joined him in Kirtan. The Dhindsa village people showed him great respect.

Everybody attended the Kirtan Diwans. Among them was a girl about 19 years old. She came with her newly born son in her lap. She liked to hear the Kirtan.

One time she sat in front of the congregation just opposite the podium where Babaji was seated. After Ardaas the Prashad was distributed to the sangat. This girl was sitting with the baby in her lap, she received Prashad and started to eat. Babaji was watching. He said, *"Bibi give Prashad to the boy in your lap"*. So, she put a few grains of Prashad into the child's mouth. Then Babaji loudly said *"Say the Jaikara, Bole-So-Nihal to bless this baby boy."* So, the sangat said *"Bole-so-Nihal !"*



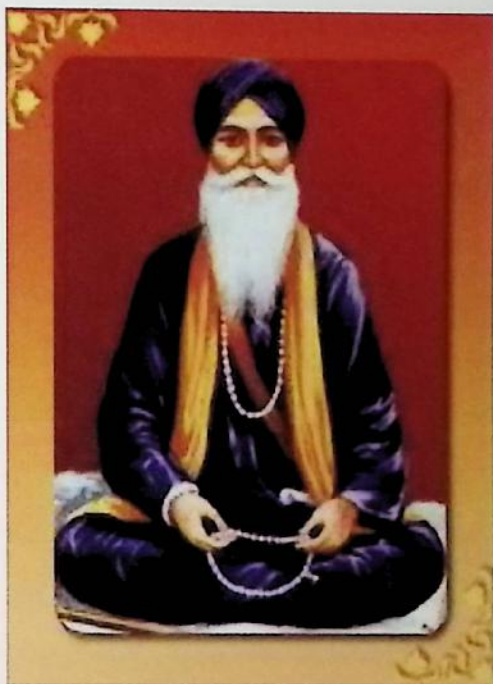
Babaji said *"This boy will be a Guru's Singh"*. The girl was my mother, Beeji, and the child in her lap was me! Beeji often talked of this incident to me.

Before Babaji left Dhindsa, he asked the villagers to build a Gurdwara and to do regular Kirtan. Several landowners offered part of their land to build the Gurdwara.

Babaji walked around the perimeter of this village, and the sangat followed him. He had a sharp stick in his hand. He reached a spot not far from Thaia Narain Singh's house and pushed the stick into the ground, said a Jaikara and said *"The Gurdwara should be built here."*

The Gurdwara was built there on that spot and still stands there. On one of the walls somebody had painted the picture of Babaji sitting and with his hand in Guru Gobind Singh Ji's robe pocket.

The Gurdwara's management has since been handed over to the Akaal Academy from Baru Sahib. They have started a school there for boys and girls from Dhindsa and surrounding villages.



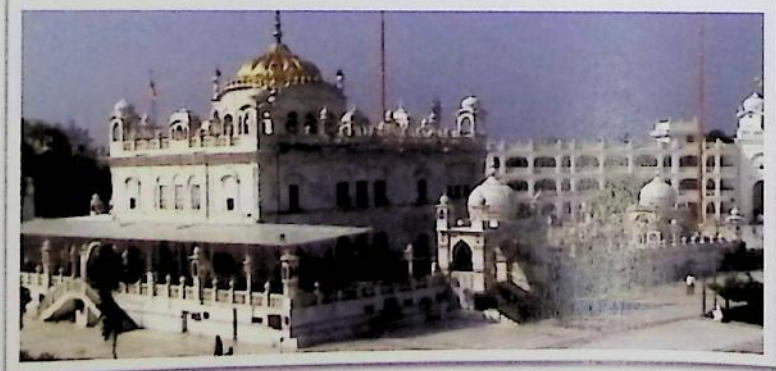
**Baba Nidhan Singh Ji**

## Trip to Hazoor Sahib, 2010

In 2010, as the girls were all married and settled with their families, we decided to go by ourselves back to India and travel to Hazoor Sahib. This was where Guru Gobind Singh Ji had spent his last few years on earth.

The visit to Hazoor Sahib, I felt, had to be done for other reasons. Nanaji always wanted to go there and could not manage to do so. It was his wish to go there. Beeji also had a wish to go there and could not make it.

We flew to Aurangabad from Delhi with Air India as there was no direct flight to Hazoor Sahib. (The airport was being built at the time). Hazoor Sahib is about 250km east of Aurangabad and 1,426km south of Delhi. The air flights and hotels were booked from, Australia.      **Hazoor Sahib Gurdwara**





We were booked into a five-star hotel in Aurangabad and with the intention to travel the following day, I made enquiries with the hotel's travel agent as we needed to hire a driver who could also bring us back after around five days. The quote was 60,000 rupees (\$1,120) to cover the driver's expenses and included his accommodation as well. I had heard stories of robbers along the route as it was a wild area. The travel agent said it happens, but it was not common.

I decided to think about it and walked out of the office. As I left a Muslim hotel employee standing there approached me and said he had overheard the conversation and that the hotel was charging a fortune! He advised us to take a train from Aurangabad railway station early the next morning at 4am which would reach Hazoor Sahib in four hours and we would reach there by sunrise. It sounded ideal and he said that he would arrange to take us to the railway station early next morning.

We packed and were ready to go at 3am. We were met by the man who had organised a rickshaw to the station. The rickshaw dropped us a little away from the station and we had to walk the rest of the way, in the dark! Dev said, "Why are there so many logs lying on the footpath?" Suddenly one of these logs started moving and we realised the "logs" were actually people sleeping on the side of the road!

At Aurangabad Train Station the man made enquires and told us to go and buy two 3<sup>rd</sup> class train tickets which I did. He told us where to sit in the 2<sup>nd</sup> class carriage, await the ticket collector and then give him 60 rupees. The "TT" came and simply said "60 rupees". He did not even ask to see our tickets! It was clearly prearranged.

The Muslim fellow from the hotel also gave us a business card for his cousin who had a tourist business in Aurangabad and if we contacted him prior to our return, he would pick us up and take us to a hotel which was better than our last accommodation, and at a tenth of the price. He would also show us around. We thanked him.

The train arrived at Nanded, Hazoor Sahib around 8am from where we took a rickshaw straight to the Gurdwara.

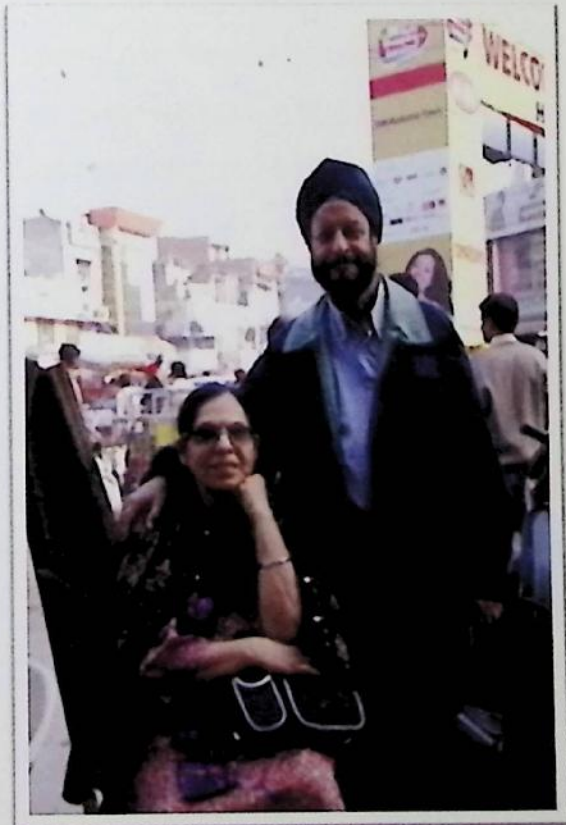
We showed our passports and were taken to rooms which had been reserved for overseas visitors only. These rooms were in a multistorey building, were large and had their own bathrooms. The complex received funds from overseas for the specific purpose of creating accommodation for overseas visitors. We were given a large room on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. It cost us 200 rupees.

### Our accommodation block



In the morning we went to the Gurdwara. Outside the Gurdwara were lots of little shops and dhabe where we had a nice breakfast of parathas. We listened to the Kirtan, then in the evening had Langar, but took our own bottled water.

### Out Shopping





We stayed for three days and although we had wanted to also visit Jhira Sahib, there was no train, just a narrow road and we did not trust the drivers to safely take us the distance of nearly 170km. Jhira Sahib was the location where Guru Nanak Dev Ji placed his foot to produce water for the locals.

Prior to our return to Aurangabad, we rang the hotel man and then booked our return train. It left at 9am, so at 7am we had a breakfast of parathas with achaar at the local dhaba and I also ordered some to take with us on the train.

An eight-year-old boy was serving us. He tripped over and dropped some parathas on the floor which he picked up and took into the kitchen.

I told the manager later to not pack us the ones which had fallen on the floor. To my horror, he replied "*Aggae Chalathae!*" meaning "Oh don't worry, I have already sold those on earlier!". I suppose I should count myself lucky for not having been **that** customer.

## The Sachkand Express

We were taken by rickshaw to the Nanded Railway Station to catch the Sachkhand Express.

As it transpires, it was just as well that we arrived early as after waiting in the queue to buy tickets, I was duly despatched off to another counter by the South Indian clerk as I had apparently not filled in the forms to purchase two first class tickets. So, I complied and returned, waited another 15 minutes in the queue only to be told that they were not filled in properly and that two sections needed re-doing! (which by the way I could have done the first time if he had only told me). I gave him 50 rupees and said, "Do it yourself!" That brought an enormous smile to the man's face and he immediately gave us our tickets and seat numbers and completed the forms for me!

It was a long train and had double bunker seats which allowed one to climb up and sleep if needed. It was difficult getting up there. Dev could not do it and I only went up for a short while.

The train departure was delayed and then suddenly a group of Sikhs from the Gurdwara boarded calling out "*Langar, Langar*".

They were giving out rotis, dhal and sabji and indeed very generously fed the entire lot of passengers. Those who knew had brought their containers with them and had them filled up for the journey ahead. There were also samosas and tea. We had some samosas.

It was a comfortable journey of around three hours. In Aurangabad the Muslim fellows' cousins came to pick us up and took us to a newly built hotel owned by a Sikh man. The charge was quarter the price of our previous hotel.

We spent the night there and the next day the man sent his nephew to show us the famous Ajanta and Ellora caves. These caves are thousands of years old. There were statues of gods and goddesses carved into the stone in the walls. This cost 3000 rupees.



## Ajanta and Ellora Caves



We later visited a Gurdwara and there were some students serving Langar in the hope of getting good results in their final exams. We were told to put our shoes in a secure room as otherwise they could have been stolen. It was only Dev and I there. The students looked at us in surprise as they were not expecting anyone there. We did not stay long.

Outside it was extremely hot, so we bought some bottles of cold Pepsi. Dev wanted a straw but there were none to be found. Eventually the shopkeeper found two under a dusty cloth on a dusty shelf in a dusty corner. He dusted them off for us. We promptly put them in the bin. The Pepsi was extremely sweet. It had been made for local Indian tastes with extra sugar.

We had been told by the tourist operator not to give any money to the driver who drove us to the caves, instead the fellow would come to our hotel in the morning to collect it as we were due to fly back out to Delhi the next day. He did not turn up. We waited and waited until the last minute, then took a rickshaw to the airport. He was not there either even though we had given him our flight details.

The final call came for our boarding. We went through security and sat down, wondering what had happened to the man. I felt guilty that I owed money.

Suddenly a huge, uniformed Sikh man, over six feet in height, approached us, twirling his moustache. "You were going to give this man some money?" he said. I immediately started worrying as I thought he had come to arrest us. Instead, he said, "He's

waiting outside". I was surprised and I said, "But I can't go out and bypass security".

"I AM THE SECURITY", he boomed. So, I went back. I came upon another official, who would not let me out. I pointed to the first Sikh man who was standing not more than three feet away, "He said I could go through".

"Well, he may have told you, but he certainly didn't tell ME" said the second man. I sighed. The Sikh security officer waved his hand, and I was ushered through.

"Sorry I am late," said the travel agent. He was completely casual as though it was no big deal, that it was perfectly okay to have had me brought back through security and then make go back through again. It was as though nothing had happened!! I gave him the money, our thanks and went back through security (again).

We caught the plane back to Delhi. That was quite an experience



# MY REAL WEALTH



## MY BETTER HALF

I am so grateful to Dev, my wife. Without her constant support, I would not have achieved my goals. She looked after the family through thick and thin.

**"There is a woman behind every successful man."** This applies to her without reservation.

She is the main reason that the girls have done so well academically. She, being a trained teacher, devised her own way of teaching them while they were young. Mandy started reading as soon as she started talking from about the age of two years. She could read Veena's medical books at the age of seven without understanding, of course!

Dev made sure that the children were settled, meals were cooked for everybody, house cleaned, all the school uniforms were ready, and that homework was always neatly done.

In Kiran's primary school one of the girls asked her why her hair was so long, to which she replied tongue-in-cheek, "It's my Mum! She makes me recite my maths times table while she combs my hair and gives it a tug if I make a mistake!!"



**Kiran's long hair!**

My colleagues in the hospital would often ask me as to how we motivate our children in doing so well at school. "It is my wife", I would reply. "She has her own ways!"

Dev took pains to teach the girls the basics of cooking. One day Mandy, when she was about five years old, offered to make tea for all of us. She put salt in the tea instead of sugar!

We encouraged the children to take part in public speaking activities. They were encouraged to read Gurbani Shabads and recite events from Sikh history in front of the sangat in the Gurdwara. This helped them at school in participating in school debates and public speaking competitions. Pitey won the interschool public speaking competition in the Newcastle area.



Watching TV was controlled. We watched family suitable movies and programmes on tv together. Dr. Who was the favourite for all of us. If a frightening scene came onto the screen, Mandy would cover her face with a cushion till the scene was played out!

Family life was fun. For our holidays we used to book a beach front building. Time was spent on the beach and playing board games in the evening. The children also enjoyed eating out in different restaurants.

Dev and I have been married for nearly sixty years. There were ups and downs in our lives, but we made it through comfortably with God's Grace.

So much more can be written but the story has almost reached its end.

## ***Hoorah Village Boy!***

## **EPILOGUE**

I have certainly lived a remarkably interesting and fruitful life.

Starting as an ordinary village boy from a small village in Punjab, I achieved a lifelong dream of becoming a doctor. The task initially appeared to be impossible. There were lots of difficult times along the way which were surmounted with the help of Waheguru. There were lots of times when I thought I would not be able to achieve my goal. Help came at the right time. There is certainly a Higher "Power" that looks after us all. One should never lose faith.

My parents, although not financially well off, always encouraged me. Pitaji encouraged me to become independent right from the age of eight years. He always had a "Get up and go" spirit in him, which he instilled in all his children, that helped us to keep going despite difficulties. Beeji was the anchor of the family. She always came up with sound advice when needed. She was a very wise lady. She helped to bring up the girls and they have all absorbed her wisdom.

Finally, I hope this book will be of help to my grandchildren in their planning and fulfilling their own dreams!

**Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!**





